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HONG KONG FILM, HOLLYWOOD AND NEW GLOBAL CINEMA

No film is an island

Edited by Gina Marchetti and Tan See Kam

Hong Kong Film, Hollywood and the New Global Cinema

Hong Kong is now a major player of the new global cinema. Hong Kong cinema has strong connections both to Hollywood, and to world and Asian regional markets, while scholarly interest in the history and development of Hong Kong cinema has grown considerably in recent years. This book examines a wide range of aspects of Hong Kong cinema, and discusses the role of Hong Kong cinema in changing global film markets. It explores Hong Kong cinema's inextricable links with China, Korea, Japan, Southeast Asia, Australia, the United States, and the Chinese diaspora. It considers Hong Kong's connection with Hollywood, which involves ties that bring together art cinema and popular genres as well as film festivals and the media marketplace with popular transnational genres, and demonstrates how Hong Kong film, throughout its history, has challenged, redefined, expanded, and exceeded its borders. It includes significant new analysis of older films, such as New Wave classic *Shanghai Blues*; new perspectives on established genres, including martial arts, action and horror; and reconsiderations of neglected directors, most notably Johnnie To. Overall, this book examines Hong Kong film in the contexts of globally interconnected filmmaking practices and film scholarship.

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Preface

In April 2004, the Fulbright Program in Hong Kong and Macau hosted a symposium entitled *Hong Kong/Hollywood at the Borders: Alternative Perspectives, Alternative Cinemas*. Bringing together scholars from around the world, this symposium helped to uncover research on Hong Kong cinema's complex international connections, which include but also extend beyond Hollywood. The presentations at the symposium revealed links Hong Kong has with world film culture both within and beyond the commercial Hollywood paradigm.

The symposium encouraged scholars to take a fresh perspective on Hong Kong commercial cinema, its position vis-à-vis Hollywood, and its place within the regional media marketplace. Although John Woo, Jackie Chan, and several Hong Kong filmmakers with a connection to Hollywood have been extensively researched in recent years, other topics require further analysis. In addition to Hong Kong filmmakers working in Hollywood, many American-educated filmmakers work in Hong Kong. Genres of common concern (e.g. action, martial arts, comedy, and melodrama) continue to link the industries in increasingly complex ways, technologically (with the digital revolution) and industrially (with more aggressive forays into exploiting Hong Kong films by American distributors like Miramax). Thus, economic and industrial links between Hong Kong and Hollywood involve transnational capital flows, labour migrations, and the globalisation of culture and media in increasingly complex interdependent relationships. Moreover, issues of gender, class, race, ethnicity, political affiliation and national formation continue to merit scholarly attention as Hong Kong's relationship to the PRC, its place within the Pacific Rim, and its connection to the rest of 'global' China remain in flux.

In recent years, with the establishment of the Hong Kong Film Archive and growing scholarly interest in the history of Hong Kong cinema, previously neglected historical documents and difficult to access films have offered new materials for academic consideration. As the Hong Kong film history comes into sharper focus, its inextricable links across the decades to Southeast Asia, Korea, Japan, the United States, and to the farther reaches of the Chinese diaspora globally also become more evident. As the history of

Hong Kong's relationship to US cinema extends back into time, the development of Hong Kong's relationship to the American film industry immediately before and after 1997 also continues to merit scholarly attention. Hong Kong's connection with Hollywood involves ties that bring together art cinema and popular genres, as well as film festivals and the media marketplace for popular transnational genres. The symposium brought to light the hybrid, multidimensional aspects of Hong Kong cinema that put it at the borders in so many ways beyond the strict confines of state boundaries.

This anthology brings together highlights from the symposium with some additional essays to provide a range of new research on Hong Kong cinema. It emphasises Hong Kong film in relation to other cinema industries, including Hollywood. As the collection demonstrates, Hong Kong film, throughout its history, has challenged, redefined, expanded, and exceeded its borders. By looking at the way Hong Kong cinema operates in what Esther Yau has called a 'borderless world', this volume attempts to build on extant research as well as expand on the ways in which scholars working in English have come to understand Hong Kong film in recent years. Ultimately, it seeks to foster and forge what Tan See Kam has called a 'globally inter-connected pedagogy' in film and media studies.

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Hong Kong Film, Hollywood, and the New Global Cinema: No Film is an Island grew out of the *Hong Kong/Hollywood at the Borders: Alternative Perspectives, Alternative Cinemas* symposium held in Hong Kong and Macao between 1–5 April 2004. As a Fulbright-initiated event, many people associated with the Fulbright Program helped to make the symposium possible, including Gina Marchetti (one of the editors of this anthology), Ramona Curry, Amy Lee (who has an essay in this book), and Nicole Hess (former Fulbright grantee), King-Kok Cheung (Fulbright Senior Specialist), and David Horner. Other members of the organising committee included Tan See Kam (University of Macau), who is also one of the co-editors of this book, Staci Ford (University of Hong Kong), who also has an essay in this anthology, and Glenn Shive (Hong Kong America Center).

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Introduction

Hong Kong cinema and global change

Gina Marchetti (马兰清) and Tan See Kam (陈时鑫)

Contemporary Hong Kong cinema provides an entry point from which to view the dynamics of social change within the Pacific region. All of the key indicators of the momentous changes that have taken place as Asia enters global postmodernity find their correlates on the screens of this cinema as it shoots for the global popular, seeking out niches. Global economic changes have fuelled migrations of labour and resources to and from Hong Kong, fostering the emergence of new and globally-connected class formations. The speed of information exchange and the flexibility of capital, in turn, have opened up questions of property rights, piracy, and global copyrights. Meanwhile entrenched traditional values give way to new roles for women and men, changing family dynamics, and calls for gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgendered rights to public recognition. Other areas of personal identity have likewise become hotly contested, from citizenship to 'generation-ship'. The local/global nexus questions national borders, linguistic barriers, and the putative powers of the state, while unearthing class inequities, racial prejudice, and ethnic chauvinism. So as Hong Kong filmmakers do business throughout the Pacific, with Hollywood, and the rest of the world, the good, the bad, and the ugly of global film culture find their reflections within Hong Kong films. Corporate business plans take studios on a whirlwind tour;[1] design professionals ply their trades in the Hong Kong and Hollywood industries;[2] Hollywood repackages Hong Kong films as remakes, making Hong Kong film fantasies part of the Hollywood mainstream.

Looking at Hong Kong cinema from the 1980s through to the beginning of the new millennium likewise reveals the multifarious ways in which the Hong Kong film industry has changed, and by which it has become more globally (inter-)connected than before. The signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984 which promised the return of the colony to mainland China, the Tian'anmen protests in 1989, and Hong Kong's sovereignty changeover in 1997, followed by the Asia financial crisis in the same year, have affected, in a veritable way, that industry's behavioural and developmental patterns in regards to production, distribution and exhibition. Into the new millennium, Hong Kong – now a Special Administrative Region (SAR) – continues, as it always has, to negotiate and renegotiate its place,

position and standing with respect to the People's Republic and the rest of the world. Meanwhile the continuing trials and tribulations which East Asia face – from the on-going disputes between the People's Republic of China (PRC), Korea, and Japan over the latter's attempts to downplay its wartime atrocities to the recent calls in Taiwan for national independence, from the recurring territorial bickering between claimants of Spratly Islands in South China Sea to the United States-led 'war on terrorism', from the SARS crisis that afflicted much of East and Southeast Asia to more threats of mutated and fatal viruses carried by migratory birds – have similarly beset Hong Kong which in turn has seen massive public support for self-rule based on an open democratic process, within the 'one China, two systems' set-up.

Given the dramatic shifts in Hong Kong's political, economic, social, and cultural status and environs over the last two decades or so, it does not come as any surprise that Hong Kong's filmmaking practices should change from top to bottom, and experience other types of makeovers as well. This period saw the demise of the last of Hong Kong's vertically integrated studio systems when Shaw Brothers formally ceased feature film production in 1985, while its rival competitor, Golden Harvest, threw its weight and resources behind Jackie Chan, using its Jackie Chan trump card to reestablish the company's ties with Hollywood – those previously fostered by superstar Bruce Lee but put asunder by Lee's sudden death in 1973. A new breed of relatively independent and mostly overseas-trained filmmakers, on the other hand, started to make waves both at home and overseas, with some catching a ride into the global popular and the global niche market, via international film festivals (see Chapter 12 by Cindy Wong).

The First Wave appeared around 1980, with the Second Wave rolling into sight before that decade was out. Notable names from the two waves soon became 'brand-names' of the Hong Kong filmmaking scene, the markers of distinguished Hong Kong films on world screens. They – both directors and actors – were no less glittering and glamorous than the past studio era stars, but their name would shine brighter and longer than the studio that produced the films. During the postwar era, and its immediate aftermath, directors such as Lee Han-hsiang and Chang Cheh, actresses such as Lin Dai, Lee Li-Hua, Ling Bo, Lily Ho, Cheng Pei-Pei and actors such as Wang Yu, Ti Lung and David Chiang were but Shaw Brothers' stars. Film directors Ann Hui, Allen Fong and Tsui Hark of the First Wave and those of the Second Wave – for example, Wong Kar-wai, Stanley Kwan, Mabel Cheung and Clara Law – on the other hand, were stars without specific studio affiliation, as were actresses Cherie Chung, Anita Mui, and Maggie Cheung and actors Leslie Cheung and Andy Lau. On the 'fringe' of these waves floated John Woo and Jackie Chan who would soon be lured to Planet Hollywood. This new breed of filmmakers were not the exclusive property of a particular studio, in the traditional sense. Although some like Jackie Chan would remain long-time associates of studios like Golden Harvest, others, such as Tsui Hark and Wong Kar-wai, are simultaneously producers

for their own film company: Film Workshop and Jet Tone Films, respectively. Studio owners and film producers as such are, by no means, like past movie moguls – Run Run Shaw (of Shaw Brothers) or Raymond Chow (of Golden Harvest) – who could afford to keep a stable of talent on exclusive contracts. The new breed has agents as wheeler-dealers, and is thus relatively more mobile than its past studio counterpart: belonging to nobody and everybody, the former group thus beats a career-track through and across various studios. In short, the age of wheeler-dealing with stars as highly individualised brand-names (as opposed to studios as brands) has dawned upon the post-1980 Hong Kong film industry. This trend persists to the present day; so much so that one could, if one so wishes, talk about the Fruit Chan film or the Stephen Chow film in almost the same tone of revered respect that one might reserve for the Shaw Brothers film or the Golden Harvest film from the past studio era, or more contemporaneously, the Ann Hui film, the Tsui Hark film, the Clara Law film, the Anita Mui film, or the Leslie Cheung film. Brand-names also permit distinctions to be drawn, say, between Stephen Chow's and Jackie Chan's (action) comedies – the former uses *mou lei tau* humour, while the latter runs with dare-devil stunts – or between John Woo's slow-mo bullet dance triad films and Johnnie To's triad noir (see Collier [Chapter 9] and Rist [Chapter 10], this volume).

Brands, or the manufacturing of brand-names, are a consequence of product differentiation and niche marketing. This mode of product promotion is, of course, not new. What is new about the current practice of brand-making is that it foregrounds the star as definitive of product identity, whereas vertically integrated studios of the past such as Shaw Brothers relied on the studio-logo-as-trademark strategy which ironically had the effect and consequence of rendering star-power as somewhat secondary to the company's identity. In the age of capitalist globalisation, product differentiation increasingly becomes driven by the cult of star personality, with company logos lurking in the shadow of star-power: unlike logos, stars have the advantage of possessing human(-like) attributes that lend to more congenial and personalised promotional strategies. Anyone can make a movie nowadays, so the logic goes, but only Wong Kar-wai can make a 'Wong Kar-wai' film – no one else! This personalised association in turn supports sophisticated niche marketing in the global trade for films. Thus branded, the Wong Kar-wai film would have a longer ballistic range through the cracks of international film distribution and exhibition circuits, otherwise characterised by genre films, homogeneity of film products, and commercial interests.

It is however tempting to conflate director-based brands as such with auteurism. A preoccupation in some quarters of film studies, the auteurist approach privileges the director's individuality as the dominant creative force of particular films, and sustains the romantic view of the auteur as 'a "heroic" embattled creative artist' who despite the odds, would somehow soar above the profit-driven imperative of the capitalist film economy.[3] We

resist the auteurist approach as such, for four reasons. One, films are products of collective efforts. Two, they have a strong correlate to the social – that extra-filmic realm which makes film production, exhibition, distribution, and reception possible. Three, auteurism reeks of elitism. Finally, four, it is a discursive construct in the sense that auteurs cannot exist independently of the discourses that manufacture them as such. Or as Tan See Kam might put it, 'No film is an island' (see Chapter 1).

That Wong Kar-wai won the top award at Cannes in 1997 with *Happy Together* nonetheless made him a meaty choice for auteurist studies. However, the film's highly visible global success also points to contradictions apropos to the place of Hong Kong within a global context: *Happy Together* offers all but only a passing glimpse of Hong Kong in a film otherwise set in Argentina and Taiwan. Hong Kong stories take place elsewhere as characters move into a Chinese diaspora populated by a Hong Kong middle-class on the move because of 1997. The fact that this is also a queer love story about homosexuals within another gay diaspora adds to the sense that Hong Kong exists outside the boundaries of the traditional Chinese family and the borders of the Chinese nation. Hong Kong has brought its own vision of Chinese culture as cosmopolitan, sexually emancipated, adventurous, and enterprising to the world. *Happy Together* provides a story about Hong Kongers abroad on screen, while Wong Kar-wai, Chris Doyle, Tony Leung, and Leslie Cheung provide a parallel story of the Hong Kong film industry off-screen. This international cast and production thus both foster and represent Hong Kong film's global reach – from Hong Kong to Argentina, to France (Cannes), and back to Hong Kong again, via Taiwan.

However, the film's high point on the world stage hid the fact that the Hong Kong film industry had hit on very hard times. Hollywood dominated domestic box-office, captured regional audiences once loyal to Hong Kong films, and drew away key talent, including John Woo and Jackie Chan. The interference of the triads, the rise of video pirates, and other situations struck more blows to the once-booming industry. The artistic apogee is thus concomitant to a commercial nadir, and with the death of Leslie Cheung and a further economic downturn occasioned by SARS in 2003, the film industry could really not go much lower. Yet 2003 also saw a reinvigoration of the industry with the box-office hit *Infernal Affairs*. This film, together with other triad-policiers from Johnnie To's Milky Way Image Company, and the continuing international critical interest in directors like Wong Kar-Wai, Stanley Kwan, and Fruit Chan, have continued to make Hong Kong a viable player in global film culture.

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In a nutshell then, *Hong Kong Film, Hollywood and the New Global Cinema* strives to chart the dynamics engendered by the Hong Kong New Wave and its legacy as well as those sustained by the efforts of filmmakers of the new millennium through the vicissitudes of the commercial industry. The

anthology accordingly maps out the ways contemporary Hong Kong cinema positions its brands and brand-names globally so as to find trans-local and trans-regional niches within the transnational film marketplace. This has entailed Hong Kong cinema to move between the dictates of Hollywood's aggressive forays into the Asian market and the fashions of the international festival circuits. The particular move also demands that Hong Kong film remains in conversation with European art cinema and Hollywood commercial genres, while keeping an eye on resurgent filmmaking centres in the People's Republic, Korea, Japan, Thailand, and elsewhere in the region. The predictability of remakes or 'uptakes', on the other hand, vies with the unique vision of the 'auteur', forcing Hong Kong cinema to flex its muscles in world markets, and by turn also to remain flexible so as to find overseas niches while catering to domestic audiences. Films and filmmakers travel, and they must be able to survive and thrive in often hostile or, at least, unwelcoming environments.

The first section of *Hong Kong Film, Hollywood, and the New Global Cinema* thus trains a focus on films made by Chinese/Hong Kong filmmakers on the move in the United States, Thailand and Australia, as well as those about Chinese/Hongkongers abroad. While American connections have been strong throughout the history of Hong Kong cinema, films from Asia, particularly from China, have exerted a tremendous influence on Hong Kong popular film for just as long.[4] Tan See Kam keeps these regional and global connections in mind with a reappraisal of Tsui Hark's *Shanghai Blues*. Flowing out of the Hong Kong New Wave, *Shanghai Blues* makes playful references to multiple filmmaking traditions, from the Hollywood backstage musical to the Shanghai tenement drama. The film's particular play with an ever-growing paradigm of inter-connected references shows that no film is an island. Tan's conclusion in this connection necessarily calls to issue claims that Hong Kong popular films be seen as 'remakes, takeoffs or simply steals of popular American movies'.[5] This viewpoint finds similar echoes, in a recurrent way, in the respective studies which Bliss Lim, Kwai-Cheung Lo, Joelle Collier, and Peter Hitchcock offer to this collection. Its recurrence serves up the terse reminder that film scholars of contemporary Hong Kong cinema should avoid the mistake of taking the Planet Hollywood tree for the forest of Hong Kong cinema.

Aaron Han Joon Magnan-Park observes the change of direction in John Woo's film career after his emigration from Hong Kong to the United States. In Chapter 2, he specifically examines the tug of war between the (Chinese) *junzi* code of honour and Hollywood's commitment to individualist heroism with reference to Woo's Hollywood corpus. For Magnan-Park, Woo seems to have lost his 'auteurist' balls and bearings to 'mainstream America', after moving to Hollywood. Woo's one-time collaborator in filmmaking, Tsui Hark, on the other hand, has taken a reversed trans-Pacific passage: he went from Vietnam, where he was born, to Hong Kong and then to America, where he studied film and television, and then back to Hong Kong again,

where he began his filmmaking career and becomes a Hong Kong filmmaker with a transnational reach. Though he flirted with Hollywood briefly, he now appears more at home in Hong Kong as a filmmaker.

Staci Ford (Chapter 3) provides an overview of Hong Kong filmmakers, including John Woo, who have commented on America in their films. In particular, she takes a close look at their fascination with New York City as mirror of Hong Kong, in films like John Woo's *A Better Tomorrow II*, Jackie Chan's *Rumble in the Bronx*, Peter Chan's *Comrades: Almost a Love Story*, Mabel Cheung's *An Autumn's Tale*, Clara Law's *Farewell China*, and Evans Chan's *Crossings*. These films highlight the experiences of Chinese/Hongkongers on the move in the American metropolis. Amy Lee's essay on Hong Kong soap operas in Chinatown looks at a similar phenomenon (Chapter 4, this volume). It elucidates the reasons why Hong Kong television series have travelled within American ethnic communities. For Lee, America's Chinatowns condense a microcosm of Hong Kong in a parasocial way: both have a history as a place of immigrants where tremendous hope and trepidation coexist. This commonality appeals to Hongkongers both at home and abroad. The role of female characters in these Hong Kong soap operas becomes a particularly fecund field for analysis of the ways in which women must continually negotiate (and renegotiate) issues of ethnic, national, cultural, and gender identity as they move between transnational Chinese and multicultural American communities.

Adam Knee's Chapter 5 takes us to Thailand, and offers another dimension of Hong Kong's specular spectrum. While Hong Kong films with a New York setting tend to associate this place with city life, financial opportunity, speed and modernity, they also show its dark side of racial violence, gang warfare, unjust immigration policies, and threat of economic despair. Thailand, as Knee's study of Hong Kong's Thailand-set films made between the 1960s and the 1990s reveals, offers a sense of homely comfort, even though it tends to be stereotypically portrayed as a 'backward', 'slow', and 'superstitious' place. The recent rise of Thai cinema internationally and the success of co-productions like *The Eye* would occasion a reappraisal of past Hong Kong films, and a reexamination of the connections between Thai and Hong Kong screen cultures.

Tony Mitchell (Chapter 6) rounds off this Part about Chinese/Hong Kongers on the move, by looking at the career of the Macau-born Clara Law in Australia. Mitchell charts her negotiation of her new nationality from *Floating Life*, dealing with Hong Kong migrants in Australia and Germany, through *The Goddess of 1967*, in which no Hong Kong characters appear, to her semi-autobiographical rumination on exile in *Letters to Ali*. Echoing Magnan-Park on the vicissitudes of adjusting to new circumstances and dealing with the expectations of viewers familiar with former Hong Kong directors' earlier careers, Mitchell chronicles Law's transition into the 'new world' (of Australian filmmaking). This experience has not always been a smooth one initially, but after ten years of living and working down under,

Law has become 'an Australian rather than a transnational filmmaker, with a commitment to Australian social and political issues relating to migration and asylum seekers': Law's *Letters to Ali* shows that she 'has moved a long way both physically and artistically from her previous base in Hong Kong'.

Part II explores a different sort of movement by examining how popular genres travel between and across national boundaries. Bliss Cua Lim (Chapter 7) analyses the transnational connections in the depictions of ghosts across Asia, from Thailand to Japan, with Hong Kong somewhere in-between. Among other films, she focuses on the phenomenal success of Pang brothers' *The Eye*, which has tapped into a particularly profitable vision of horror in films that blend Hollywood plots with Southeast Asian and Chinese conceptions of the metaphysical. She then looks at Hollywood's Asian remake frenzy of recent years. For Lim, these remakes are one of Hollywood's 'cultural key[s]' for opening the door to Asian markets. In Chapter 8, Kwai-Cheung Lo looks at the critical role female warriors have played in the Hong Kong martial arts film, and how that figure functions when she travels into other filmmaking contexts, while Joelle Collier and Peter Rist (Chapters 9 and 10, respectively) look at the intersections between genre, style, studio, and authorship as Hong Kong filmmakers make their own contributions to *film noir*. As Collier points out, this noir vision comes from 'postmodern Asia, not postwar America', but the attraction of noir aesthetics to Hong Kong filmmakers at the turn of the millennium belies many of the same concerns that gave birth to American noir during and immediately after World War II.

The final Part III of the book locates Hong Kong cinema in relation to global markets. In Chapter 11, Mike Walsh, following on the work of film historians/scholars like Zhong Baoxian and Steve Fore,[6] looks at the ways in which Golden Harvest has positioned itself since the 1970s as a major player in the international film marketplace. Cindy Wong (Chapter 12) looks at the extraordinary performance of Hong Kong movies in international film festivals. As the chapters by Stephanie Donald and John Gammack (Chapter 13), and Laikwan Pang (Chapter 14) show, the way in which Hong Kong represents itself to the world through cinema remains inextricably intertwined with other key areas of its economy – tourism in particular. The Hong Kong Tourism Board (reconstituted from Hong Kong Tourism Association in 2001), for example, has long attempted to sell Hong Kong as a destination by relying on a particular look and sense of glamour associated with the place through its representation in the popular media. Although the official image of Hong Kong presented by the tourism board and the depiction of the city in the cinema are often at odds, the interconnections between tourism and film cannot be denied or ignored. That Jackie Chan has been Hong Kong's official tourism ambassador since 1995 is indeed not a matter of coincidence: Jackie Chan is a brand-name unto itself, and a star brand, no less. The opening of the Avenue of Stars as one of Hong Kong's major sites of tourist attraction in 2004 is yet another case in point. Located at

Kowloon's Tsim-Sha-Tsui Promenade, this avenue 'pays tribute to the stars of the silver screen' and has 'handprints of individual stars, sculptures, movie history milestones of the past hundred years and movie memorabilia kiosks'.[7] If filmmakers like Fruit Chan and Johnnie To show the underbelly of the government's sanitised version of Hong Kong as 'Asia's world city', the play of contradictions testifies to the importance of looking at these image, design, and service industries from a global perspective that includes world cinema. Peter Hitchcock (Chapter 15) concludes the anthology by looking at the niche market for Hong Kong popular films, including action comedies like Stephen Chow's *Shaolin Soccer* and *Kung Fu Hustle*, and the way in which that niche market could expand into the general film marketplace through the promotional efforts of American directors like Quentin Tarantino.

In fact, Hitchcock's concluding essay brings the collection full circle. It makes the links by examining, among others, *Kung Fu Hustle* in the terms of a Shanghai tenement film that references both Hollywood and Chinese film histories, within a contemporary commercial context. In so doing, it both recalls and reconnects with Tan's chapter on *Shanghai Blues* which opens *Hong Kong Film, Hollywood, and the New Global Cinema*. Although Hollywood remains a hegemonic force in the global film market, although it has by turn made global stars out of Jackie Chan and John Woo, and although it has purchased the remake rights to Hong Kong films like *Infernal Affairs* and *The Eye*, Asia and the rest of the world continue to exert their influence and demand their due. While John Woo moves to Hollywood and Clara Law takes up residence in Australia, most other Hong Kong filmmakers prefer to stay put, patiently riding out the industry's current depressed state. They stay afloat by keeping a keen tab on the demands of the domestic film scene and the global marketplace, on the one hand, while continuously seeking out regional/transnational co-production opportunities, on the other hand. In that connection, they have turned to PRC, Korea, Taiwan, and Japan in the north, and answered to calls from Thailand and Singapore in the south. In staying afloat, they remain open to the transnational politics of 'flexible citizenship',[8] making films that flex with the whims of international film festivals and that flux to the winds of globalised capitalism. Widespread video piracy and Hollywood's remake frenzy have indeed not kept Hong Kong filmmakers from continuing to make an impact on global screen culture. Stars like tourism ambassador Jackie Chan have attained their American Dream of a Hollywood career while clinging to their 'brand-name' as Hong Kong celebrities. John Woo's assimilation into mainstream America does not abate niche hunger for Hong Kong kung fu, and *mou lei tau Shaolin Soccer* and *Kung Fu Hustle* fill the void. While producers and distributors may battle over brands and intellectual property rights, and while the 'genuine nationality' of many of Hong Kong's trans-local films, from King Hu's *A Touch of Zen* to Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden*

Dragon, from Lee Chi-Ngai's *Sleepless Town* to the Pang brothers' *The Eye*, from Stephen Chow's *Kung Fu Hustle* to Clara Law's *Floating Life*, may remain a hotly contested area, international brand (mis)recognition would mark them inexorably as 'Hong Kong-made', even when this is not always simply the case.

Part I

Chinese on the move

‘Hongkongers’ abroad

1 From *South Pacific* to *Shanghai Blues*

No film is an island

Tan See Kam (陈时鑫)

> … The love of my heart / Is it the dream of your heart?
> Is it possible to borrow a bridge for us to connect?
> On this borrowed bridge / The I of tomorrow, the you of tomorrow
> Can the embrace be like the other day again!? …
>
> (Theme Song, *Shanghai Blues*)[1]

> The allusion to the Shanghai classic *Crossroads/Shi Zi Jie Tou* (1937) and the depiction of Shanghai as a magical metropolis, is [*sic*] Tsui [Hark]'s way of paying tribute to the golden era of Chinese cinema … *Shanghai Blues* is the first explicit indication of Tsui's status as a true 'movie brat', conscious of Chinese film history and its links with Hong Kong cinema.
>
> (Stephen Teo, 1997)[2]

Introduction

While manifesting a perceptive awareness for the cinematic phenomenon of overlaps in filmmaking practices between classic Shanghai cinema of the 1930s and late colonial Hong Kong cinema of the 1980s, Stephen Teo's observation in regards to *Shanghai Blues* (*Shanghai Zhi Ye*; dir. Tsui Hark [Xu Ke], 1984) is however inattentive to the intricate complexity therein. My close reading of *Shanghai Blues* here elaborates on this complexity, in the following related ways.[3] First, it takes an intertextual approach to the film – the ways this film (as a text) cites other texts, filmic or otherwise. It will show that the so-called 'movie brat' in Tsui, in his capacity as its producer, director and scriptwriter, has in fact done more than merely 'always evok[ing] or quot[ing] the [Shanghai film] classics of bygone eras'.[4] That is to say, the citations have the additional function and consequence of serving up structural and narrative spins, spins that have enabled an otherwise cliché-ridden film to break away from established norms so that it be felt and seen in some new and original ways.

While resonating with 'postmodernity's avid disdain for originality (or more accurately, the cult of the original) … [consequent to] the expansion of pastiche and affective flattening afforded by globalisation',[5] this kind of breakaway points to tactics of strategic selection and creative manipulation

in regards to cultural traditions, intellectual ideas and filmic forms established within and outside Hong Kong. These are tactics that involve astute juggling of 'foreign' and 'local' cultural capital accrued in, and available to, the late colonial Hong Kong film-scape. In this sense, no film is an island: it is inextricably (inter-)connected in some way, via discourse or practice. That is to say, if Hollywood, mainland Chinese and past Hong Kong filmmaking legacies are indeed to be understood as three dominant spheres of influence in regards to post-1980 Hong Kong cinematic practices, then my reading of *Shanghai Blues* here would instantiate that contemporary Hong Kong cinema has too danced outside the putative stranglehold of those three spheres. This is arguably a defining characteristic of the new Hong Kong cinema that rolled into sight around 1980 (more below).

That said, it is necessary, however, to make clear from the outset, my stand in regards to the Hong Kong–Hollywood connection with respect to Hong Kong cinema. On this matter, three gross generalisations which David Bordwell has made in his otherwise illuminative book, *Planet Hong Kong* (2000), would serve as my immediate point of departure, most particularly:

> From the start Hong Kong film was indebted to America … Today Hollywood remains *the* reference point [for Hong Kong cinema] … As Hong Kong became part of world film culture [since the 1980s], American filmmakers returned the compliment of plagiarism … signal[ing] the Hongkongfication of American cinema.[6]

Bordwell's grand sketch of the Hong Kong-America (Hollywood) intercinematic connection demands a leap of faith. Admittedly, Hong Kong filmmaking from the start was 'indebted' to America in that *Right a Wrong with Earthenware Dish/Wa Pen Shen Yuan* and *Stealing the Roasted Duck/ Tou Shao Ya* – the two earliest known Hong Kong fictional films – were produced by an American national, Benjamin Brodsky, and that these productions were most likely made with film stock and equipment imported from America.

That said, my observations are as follows: first, the two said films, both produced in 1909, and directed by Liang Shaobo (a Chinese theatre actor-director and amateur film enthusiast), were adapted from well-known Chinese opera repertoire, that is, non-American resources. Since there are no surviving prints of the two films, it is not possible to compare their formal style with, say, Thomas Edison's (one of the founding 'fathers' of American filmmaking) heavily staged *The Execution of Mary, Queen of Scots* (1895). Nonetheless, what those three examples have made abundantly clear is that cross-medium borrowing has indeed been a trait of fictional filmmaking from the beginning.

Second, while the supposed 'Hongkongfication of American cinema' in recent times will remain a moot point for film scholars for years to come,[7] this cinema has had a long history of importing creative talent, from its

earliest days. For example, Charlie Chaplin – one of the biggest names associated with Hollywood's silent film era – was in fact an English comic before Keystone contracted him, from across the Atlantic. Then, trans-atlantic stories were also a popular source for adaptation. Well-known examples would include Edison's *The Execution of Mary, Queen of Scots* and other silent films like D. W. Griffith's epic *Intolerance* (1916) which contains stories about 'Love's Struggle through the Ages' (also the film's subtitle) in ancient Babylon, historic Judea and Renaissance Paris. Recent Hollywood blockbusters such as Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* (2000) and Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001, 2002 and 2003) clearly show that Hollywood producers continue to maintain the transatlantic connection, while casting their eyes further afield – the former film runs with gladiators in ancient Rome, with New Zealand-born/Australian-trained Russell Crowe playing the titular role, while the latter epic is based on J. R. R. Tolkien's novel of the same name (1954–55); it is shot in New Zealand and directed by a New Zealander, with an international cast. It is true that early American filmmakers have drawn on American sources as well, as in the case of, say, D. W.Griffith's *The Birth of the Nation* (1915) which is based on Thomas Dixon Jr's novel *The Clansman* (1905); but this intra-cultural connection does not hide that the fact that American cinema, then and now – like Hong Kong cinema (of whichever era) – has been produced by, and productive of, the interplay between internal and external forces, filmic, cultural or otherwise.

As such, Bordwell's concept for understanding overlaps between cinemas in the terms of 'plagiarism' is not only conceptually lame, but also offers little insight into the interplay of intersections in cinemas (or, for that matter, cross-medium borrowing and cross-territory appropriation) which account for the diverse filmmaking traditions that we know today. This conceptual shortfall is due to Bordwell's unrelentingly uncritical application of formalism in relation to film studies. Let me explain the issues involved analogically. A formalist approach to American English and British English would conclude that the form of the two languages is similar to the extent that they both have a common lexicon and grammar. But it would be ludicrous to then deduce that the former, though a derivative of sorts in relation to the latter, is a plagiarist form of language; this type of deduction neglects the force of history, society and culture on the matter of language development, across time and space. Just as the Hong Kong and Hollywood cinemas both converge and diverge in part, the two English-based languages are likewise simultaneously similar and different, manifesting linguistic idiosyncrasies and overlaps. Hence, MGM would make color films, while Pinewood would shoot theirs on colour filmstock.

If, as Bordwell has charged, '[i]ntellectuals who expatiate on the cultural significance of a movie and pop song [have paid] virtually no attention to the ways in which the [film-]artisan has used the medium',[8] then the Bordwellian school of formalism in relation to its appropriation of Hong Kong films for

Planet Hong Kong would be guilty of a slightly different charge: that it has not paid enough attention to the manner in which film-artisans from different cultures have used the medium differently, and for different purposes.

Bordwell's observation that 'Hollywood remains *the* reference point' for contemporary Hong Kong cinema is indeed grounds for laying that second charge.[9] His use of the determiner-article here raises an urgent question: to what extent have Hollywood-tinted glasses affected Bordwell's viewing of the '370'[10] Hong Kong films for *Planet Hong Kong*? His subsequent 'essayist attempt[s] to understand the interplay of art and entertainment' have indeed subjugated Hong Kong filmmaking within an ideology of universalism; or, in Bordwell's words,

> despite many claims to the contrary in our multicultural milieu, there are more commonalities than differences in human cultures: universal physical, social, and psychological predispositions and facial expressions of many emotions will be quickly understood in a film, whatever its country of origin.[11]

The image of parents shedding tears for their dead child, whether in the United States or Iraq, spells sorrow, but when seen through the context of the so-called war on terror(ism) the tears would surely tell us of more than just personal grief! In determinedly propounding the ideology of universalism as his conceptual premise for *Planet Hong Kong*, Bordwell has thus chosen to skirt around issues of historical and cultural differences in the matter of film production and consumption, and the contexts involved. Little surprise then that Bordwell would make the mistake of taking the Planet Hollywood tree for the forest of Hong Kong cinema. The sad irony here is all the more astounding when Bordwell insistently asserts, in the same breath, that 'two films produced by MGM were never analogous to two Thunderbirds rolling out of Dearborn'.[12]

Finally, as in the case of film production and consumption, film scholarship has become globally interconnected. Border-crossing professors who venture out of their usual zone of comfort to become tourists of foreign places and sightseers of 'beautiful'[13] things (including films) need to cultivate a more sensitive appreciation, if not a more responsive alertness to, the histories and cultures of the places to and from which they shuttle, from time to time, as well as those pertaining to the things they periodically encounter during their journeys. This kind of appreciation and awareness, once developed, would enrich the growing field of globally-interconnected film scholarship even more.

Tsui Hark and New Hong Kong cinema

Tsui Hark is now regarded a Hong Kong director of international stature with a transnational following and, for some, has made films that 'are very

Chinese indeed, referring as they do to Chinese history and culture, a Chinese environment'.[14] Yet he is not Hong Kong native; he was born to parents of Chinese ancestry in French Cochinchina (now Vietnam) in 1951. When he embarked on a filmmaking career in Hong Kong in 1979 he had in actuality no more than five years of accumulated residency in the territory. As a young man, Tsui lived mostly in the United States, first as an university student in film and television, occasionally making independent films (1969–75), and then working for New York's Chinatown newspaper and Chinatown Community Cable TV (1975–77). This background would initially constitute him an 'expatriate', when working in Hong Kong, whether that be with TV stations from 1977 onwards (1977–79) or for film studios since 1979 (including his own Film Workshop established in 1984). Yet in another sense, this transnational gallivanter, a diasporic (Indo)Chinese no less, could also be thought of in the terms of a 'voluntary repatriate', in that his place of relocation is to a 'Chinese' territory where he had briefly lived as a teenager (1966–69), and where he would pass as an ethnic Chinese in colonial Hong Kong, and so blend in well with the vast majority of people living there. As it turns out, this 'repatriation' has allowed Tsui to hone his craft and develop his skills as a filmmaker with a track-record that includes a brief spell in Hollywood in the 1990s.[15]

Tsui's stay in Hong Kong in the late 1970s coincided with the territory's ascendancy as an economic dragon in the Far East, this engendering a growing confidence in Hong Kong in the city's international viability. The city's tremendous success came with a force of revelation: that Hong Kong people could take on occidental rationality at its own game, on local terms, to produce a global outcome, and that Hong Kong's economic triumphs rested on an astute accumulation of 'foreign' capital for localised manipulation and a shrewd amassing of 'local' capital for global transaction. This led to the rediscovery of the local, giving credence to a new form of localism premised on a 'cancel out and pass on' attitude[16] that celebrated Hong Kong's economic achievements and global interconnectivity, while happily chucking out past connections that were deemed parochial. But as the '1997' issue emerged, and became a matter of concern, a sense of foreboding also started to set in.

In the cultural realm, around 1980 the Hong Kong New Wave – also known as the New Hong Kong Cinema – rolled into sight, of which Tsui is a major progenitor. In his book *Hong Kong: Culture and Politics of Disappearance* (1997) Ackbar Abbas observes that this new cinema has yielded films that '[assert] the importance of the local', while at the same time drawing attention to the presence of 'foreigners and foreign elements' in the territory in sustained ways not seen before; in so doing, it manifests an interest in 'investigat[ing] the dislocations of the local'.[17] Caught between the 'local' and the 'foreign', the cultural space of Hong Kong becomes difficult to represent since it would disappear as soon as it appears, thus making Hong Kong as a subject elusive to grasp, and the subjectivity of Hong Kong

slippery to behold. This particular elusiveness and slipperiness conveys a feeling of '*déjà disparu*' that, according to Abbas, is highly reflexive and expressive of the 'cancel out and move on' attitude prevalent in Hong Kong society at the time. Abbas explains thus:

> Hong Kong's history is one of shock and radical changes. As if to protect themselves against this series of traumas, Hong Kong people have little memory and no sentiment for the past. The general attitude to everything, sometimes indistinguishable from the spirit of enterprise, is cancel out and pass on.[18]

As such, the *déjà disparu* phenomenon in relation to the new cinema presents makers of this cinema with the following set of challenges: how to capture the cultural space of Hong Kong that is 'always on the point of disappearing'? how to 'construct images out of clichés' – those which the *déjà disparu* leaves behind – so that they be experienced in refreshing ways?[19] Put contextually, the razor-fast editing, hyperkinetic quick cuts, campy comic-book characters who zip in and out of the diegesis and mind-boggling storylines narrated on the run, and that all too often noisily interrupt the narrative flow of *Shanghai Blues*, are symptoms of the *déjà disparu* at work. Such characteristics are now regarded as markers of the Tsui Hark brand (of films).

Genres and affectivity

Made after 1982 (the year when Margaret Thatcher, the then British prime minister, visited the PRC to begin the process of negotiating Hong Kong's return to Chinese sovereignty) and released in 1984 (the year in which the Sino-British Joint Declaration to revert Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty in 1997 was made), *Shanghai Blues* is Tsui's sixth feature film and the debut film of Tsui's newly-formed Film Workshop.[20] Although Abbas' study of the New Hong Kong Cinema in the above-mentioned book does not include *Shanghai Blues*, the film has arguably many elements in common with the new cinema that Abbas has elaborated on; it likewise 'adopt[s] … spatial narratives to suggest dislocations' and contains 'a new complexity in the treatment of affects and emotions, a creative use of popular genres, a new localism, and a politics that can only be indirect'.[21]

Shanghai Blues is set in Shanghai around 1937 just prior to the Japanese Invasion of Shanghai and then moves on to 1947 and the Chinese Civil War which broke out within months of the Japanese surrender in September 1945. This turbulent setting serves as a backdrop for the film to track dislocations in postwar Chinese (Shanghai) society, first using the dislocations to tell stories about a society in chaos and individuals in crisis (as well as the choices and decisions they make), and then turning these stories into analogies for putting a trace on the correspondent crisis mentality in relation to

the '1997 factor' in Hong Kong. But, as we shall see, *Shanghai Blues* does more than express this social concern.

Shanghai Blues assembles a cast drawn from the Chinese diaspora: some like Kenny Bee of Hong Kong and Sylvia Chang of Taiwan are stars; others are well-known veterans of Hong Kong's postwar cinema, for example, Tian Qing and Wang Man of the Mandarin screen and Hu Feng and Long Gang of the Cantonese screen, or newcomers, for example, Sally Yeh, a Canadian national, but who, like those postwar veteran actors, is originally China-born. In the Hong Kong version of this film,[22] the characters speak Cantonese, while the songs are all in Mandarin, scored to the beat of the 1980s Canto-pop; and it is to this version of the film that I refer in my analysis of *Shanghai Blues*.

The opening of *Shanghai Blues* dazzles the senses with its quick cuts, sharp camera movements, unmotivated actions and cluttered *mise-en-scène*. Taking the form of a prologue, the narrative unfolds rapidly at, or around, two main locations, a cabaret called *Bu Ye Cheng*, or No Night City, in the French Concession of Shanghai, and an unnamed bridge somewhere in that city's outskirts. The cabaret is smoky, loud and noisy, with dolled-up women dressed in identical glittering cheongsam dancing in step on stage. Waving their plumed fans in unison, they belt out a Canto-pop style Mandarin song cheerfully: '[This place is] playground for the adventurers, heaven for the tycoons, and fun-spot for the ladies.' Off-stage are rowdy businessmen, both local and foreign, who keep an interested eye trained on the dancing girls, while discussing the business deal at hand. Outside, a jeep speeds towards the cabaret. In another part of town, two strangers, a man and a woman, take cover from a Japanese air-raid under a dark bridge; as the bombs rain down in the distance, they hold each other close for comfort, occasionally making small talk. He then decides to join the army, confident that China will win the war, thus making a metaleptic connection with the historical event of the Japanese surrender in 1945. After the air-raid, they emerge from beneath the bridge. Before they have a chance to exchange names or look at each other clearly, they are separated by a stampede on the bridge under which they have been sheltering.

This abrupt ending to the prologue leaves a puzzle: how will the two strangers recognise each other, let alone fulfil their promise to meet up again? At this point, viewers will smell a romantic melodrama in the making; those who know the genre – a staple of commercial cinema anywhere – well enough would not be surprised if the two strangers eventually get together somehow, especially since the two are played by Kenny Bee and Sylvia Chang, billed as the lead actors of *Shanghai Blues.* Nonetheless, as the film unfurls, it becomes increasingly apparent that *Shanghai Blues* is more than a romantic melodrama, that it is in fact a multi-generic film, with narrative elements drawn from slapstick comedy, the social satire film, the social realist film, the tenement film and the backstage musical, as well as film styles commonly linked to Hong Kong's postwar 'left-wing' and 'right-wing'

productions, to give just some examples of *Shanghai Blues*' inter-genre connections.[23]

The prologue is followed by the film's main story set in the postwar Shanghai of 1947. Four characters from the prologue are retained for the main story, and so become named entities (everyone in the prologue is anonymous): Do-Re-Mi (Kenny Bee) and Shu-Shu (Sylvia Chang), the two strangers under the bridge, Twentieth Uncle (Tian Qing), Do-Re-Mi's uncle, and finally Boss (Long Gang), one of the businessmen in the cabaret. The main storyline focuses primarily on the experience and (mis)adventures of Shu-Shu, Do-Re-Mi and their new friend Stool (Sally Yeh). Shu-Shu now works as a cabaret performer at No Night City. An ex-soldier with a university degree, Do-Re-Mi makes a living as a clown and nurtures a dream of becoming a composer for a well-known recording company in Shanghai. Meanwhile, Stool, a newly-arrived naïve migrant from rural China, inadvertently becomes a beauty queen, and so stumbles into the world of the decadent rich, generating slapstick mayhem. The three live in the same dilapidated tenement building. Shu-Shu and Stool are flat-mates who live one floor below Do-Re-Mi. Neither Shu-Shu nor Do-Re-Mi recognise each other, although both have wished for a reunion since they parted at the bridge ten years prior. In the meantime, Stool falls for Do-Re-Mi and makes plans for a happy 'three-people' family to consist of herself, Shu-Shu and Do-Re-Mi. This leads to the predictable complications inherent in the drama/comedy of a triangular love affair which in turn give insights into the film's complex treatment of affects and emotions in a dislocated space, or postwar Shanghai, portrayed as a city of missed opportunities, filled with pimps, prostitutes, thieves, conniving acquaintances, quick friends and greedy businessmen; in their midst are also returning soldiers, worldly-wise cabaret girls, country folk and fortune hunters.

In this place, affective emotions may be misplaced (for example, Stool's unrequited love for Do-Re-Mi) or deemed wasteful (for example, Twentieth Uncle's affection for Do-Re-Mi). And, as the endemic sex trade makes clear, they can be highly impersonal, even non-existent as well. Affectivity between Do-Re-Mi and Shu-Shu, on the other hand, is complicated in an elusive way because the two yearn to recover a past loving moment that they had experienced under a dark bridge ten years previously. In this sense, they are melancholic people. The seed of their romantic love for each other is sown at this bridge. Nurtured by fond memories, the seed sprouts a shoot of undying love. The intermittent years has done nothing to dampen that love since Do-Re-Mi and Shu-Shu occasionally return to the bridge, with the hope of a miraculous reunion: absence makes the heart grow fonder, so to speak. They thus become for each other what Jacques Lacan would call '*object petit a*', that missing object which they (mis)recognise as missing in their lives and which, if found, will make their lives complete.[24]

Viewers familiar with MGM's wartime tearjerker melodrama *Waterloo Bridge* (starring Vivien Leigh and Robert Taylor; dir. Mervyn LeRoy, 1940)

might detect, even see, in Do-Re-Mi and Shu-Shu's melancholia the shades and shadows of Myra and Roy and their tragic love story.[25] Myra and Roy meet by chance near Waterloo Bridge. An air-raid then forces them to take cover in a bomb-shelter close by where they fall in love; however, he has to leave for the front-line soon after. Thus separated, they pine for each other and yearn for a reunion. In *Waterloo Bridge*, a train station in London is the site of the lovers' reunion. Trains and train stations are likewise part of *Shanghai Blues*' cityscape. Do-Re-Mi and Shu-Shu eventually reunite near a train station, or more precisely, in a crowded train compartment. Allusions and similarities apart, the differences between *Shanghai Blues* and *Waterloo Bridge* are stark in a number of significant ways. Most evident is the issue of class. Class difference, or social standing, is a major impediment to the relationship between Myra and Roy; the former is a ballerina-turned-prostitute, while the latter is an aristocrat who is also a decorated war hero. The social ostracism from high society that Myra faces eventually drives her to suicide, leaving Roy to mourn her forever. In *Shanghai Blues*, Ro-Re-Mi and Shu-Shu are poor; while the latter is a cabaret singer, the former is not a war hero. No one commits suicide, though Shu-Shu accidentally falls into a river and nearly drowns. Stool rescues her. Thinking it was a suicide attempt, she chides her sternly: 'What a stupid thing to do!'

Do-Re-Mi and Shu-Shu's melancholia impedes their capacity for romantic love in the present-time which explains why the two do not fall in love, despite living in close proximity. As neighbours, they would run into each other from time to time, including a chance meeting on that bridge where they parted ten years previously; on occasions such as these, they maintain a collegial distance. Their hearts are a-burst with love (for each other) and a desire to love and be loved. Yet they cannot put a face or name to this somewhat elusive affective feeling – the literalness of which is sharply captured in the framed picture which Do-Re-Mi owns. This picture has a photo and an ink sketch, side-by-side. The photo shows Do-Re-Mi in his graduation regalia, while the sketch has the outline of a face which sports a hair-do similar to Shu-Shu's bob (as seen at the bridge in the prologue). The face has a large, bold question mark above the lips, but no eyes or nose. 'She is my girl friend', Do-Re-Mi admits to Stool at one point. Blushing, he then adds: 'I have been looking for her for ten years'.

As mentioned, Do-Re-Mi and Shu-Shu eventually reunite (as lovers) in a crowded train. If melodrama is the privileged narrative for depicting their reunion, then it is simultaneously undermined by the comic element introduced in the scene immediately preceding: there, Do-Re-Mi runs after the moving train at superhuman speed in order to board it. (Shu-Shu is presently on the train.) The contest of genres – here melodrama, comedy and slapstick – reaches its peak when Do-Re-Mi comes face to face with Shu-Shu in the train. The two stand at a short distance from each other, not sure what to do next. They hesitate, thus allowing for the dramatisation of a melodrama predicated on the suspense of a lover's quandary – to make up or not to

make up? This suspense is also echoed in the closing song on the soundtrack, in a timely way: 'Can the embrace be like that day again?' (More on the significance of this closing song in the conclusion.)

Meanwhile the hesitation permits a passage of diegetic time to clarify Do-Re-Mi and Shu-Shu's proximal relation to the other passengers, who will soon witness the reconciliation drama with either interest or indifference. A group of young soldiers quickly takes a morbid interest in this drama. This otherwise intensely private moment between Do-Re-Mi and Shu-Shu is thus hauled into the public domain of the diegesis, as if entertainment for all nosy onlookers. This transgression of the private/public divide offers opportunities for comedy: first, Do-Re-Mi, Shu-Shu and the anonymous soldiers are segregated into different compositional frames. One frames Shu-Shu with some male 'witnesses' behind her (mid-shot; chest-up). Let us call this composition, Shot A. Another captures Do-Re-Mi standing in front of some female 'witnesses' (Shot B); in terms of framing, it is similar to Shot A. Relative to Shots A and B, the soldiers are in a slightly tighter frame, from neck up (Shot C). Shot C functions like a 'conjunction' in a syndeton with Shots A and B as the two 'clauses' which the 'conjunction' connects, or draws together. In this way, the soldiers and other passengers become co-opted as involved facilitators of the silent exchange of gaze between Do-Re-Mi and Shu-Shu, presently immobilised to a spot across the 180 degree axis-line. Finally, the syndetic-like sequence bobs to the beat and tempo of the closing song, with the soldiers' synchronised and animated turning of the head providing comedic relief to the suspense of an impasse. So, as Do-Re-Mi and Shu-Shu eventually cross the axis-line and embrace, the soldiers – now in the same frame with Do-Re-Mi and Shu-Shu, but behind them – applaud and cheer. This is followed by a roar of approval throughout the train, as it speeds towards Hong Kong; a location which the film has earlier depicted as an unknown entity: 'Where is Hong Kong?' Shu-Shu asks Manager Kam (Hu Feng) of No Night City Cabaret who offers no reply.

Meanwhile back at the station is Stool; she chooses to remain in Shanghai. After the train pulls away, she strides back to the glittering city centre, (re)entering it armed with worldly-wise confidence. Stool the country girl is naïve no more.

Three billboards: history, fiction and parody

The film's sympathetic depiction of Do-Re-Mi, Shu-Shu and Stool as caricatures of the 'underclass' who actively stand up to the onerous environs in postwar Shanghai would be consistent with the political sensibilities of the 1930s Shanghai cinema, or for that matter, postwar Hong Kong's left-wing films, as is its satirical portrayal of the exploitative rich and their follies. As symbols of the struggling 'everyday people', Do-Re-Mi, Shu-Shu and Stool may be poor, but are resourceful and resilient, never overwhelmed by the vicissitudes of everyday life. They do not falter in the face of the increasingly

desperate socio-political situation that was emerging in China at the time. In addition to an economy turned topsy-turvy by hyperinflation, high unemployment, widespread moral corruption, postwar China was experiencing not demobilisation and peace but a rapid transition from war with Japan (1937–45) to a full-scale civil war, as the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and Guomindang (KMT) clashed over leadership (1946–49). Using this turbulent socio-political period as the film's main backdrop, and the film's central characters as metaphors for the poor, the underprivileged and the downwardly-mobile young people of that period, *Shanghai Blues* thus foregrounds a relationship of the individual-in-history and the personal-in-crisis in relation to a city-in-chaos. The film additionally makes socio-political connections between the 'blues' of individuals (Do-Re-Mi, Shu-Shu and Stool), communities (that which Do-Re-Mi, Shu-Shu and Stool collectively represent, for example), a city (Shanghai), a country (China) and an epoch (the postwar years in urban China). In so doing, *Shanghai Blues* not only oscillates between a 'historical fiction' (history imagined into fiction) and a 'fictionalised history' (fiction imagined as history), but also seeks a convergence of the two, the inherent contradictions notwithstanding.

Although the division between fact (historical event) and fiction (cinematic event) is operative in those connections, it is also simultaneously made indistinct. This is perhaps most evident in the unmotivated appearance of the *South Pacific* billboard in the film-scape which advertises the Hollywood musical's 'nationwide' release in Shanghai, Shanxi, Nanjing and elsewhere (see Figure 1.1).[26] The list contains a wicked joke: Shanxi was already under communist control by 1947; this means that Joshua Logan's *South Pacific* could not have been released there at all. More crucially, the film was in actuality not made until 1958! To regard the musical's dislocated temporality as a historical falsification is to miss two vital points which Tsui makes here, and elsewhere in *Shanghai Blues*: that history and fiction are different



Figure 1.1 Shanghai Blues. Film Workshop Co. Ltd (Hong Kong).

in degree rather than in kind, and that they are both only as real as they are constructed. This idea resurfaces, in an equally pointed and piercing way, in the last frame of the main story which shows Stool wandering past the *Zai Jian Shanghai* billboard, after sending Shu-Shu and Do-Re-Mi off at the train station (Figure 1.2).

Where the *South Pacific* billboard advertises a film made well ahead of its time, the film which the second billboard promotes actually never exists: there is no such film in the Chinese language film corpus. However it may be a sly reference to a controversial Mandarin film from the classical Shanghai period, namely *Zai Hui Ba Shanghai*, made in 1934,[27] for the following reasons. First, the title of the two films contains the term '*Shanghai*', the name of the city where Stool presently is, and where Shu-Shu and Do-Re-Mi have just left behind. Second, '*Zai Jian*' and '*Zai Hui*' are homonyms which literally translated as 'see again' and 'meet again', respectively. Here, they are salutations of sorts whose English equivalent would be 'Good-bye' which likewise carries an implicit promise to meet up again, at a future time – as in 'See you another time' or 'Meet you again'. This leaves us with the Chinese particle '*Ba*'. '*Ba*' is a word that moderates the mood of an expression to which it is appended. Generally speaking, it cannot stand alone in speech or in writing, and so is always found at the end of a salutation, command or statement, as in '*Zai Hui Ba*'.

China film historian Gong Sunlu's summary of the film's plot contains a vital clue for deciphering this mood word.[28] According to Gong, *Zai Hui Ba Shanghai* basically relates the miserable experience of a country girl, named Bai Lu, who goes to Shanghai seeking refugee but finds hardship and humiliation instead. In the end, she makes the decision to leave the 'sinful and evil metropolis' for good.[29] Viewed in this context, the mood that the particle conveys here amounts to an indignant, even moralistic, denouncement of Shanghai, accompanied by a sense of simultaneous exasperation and relief



Figure 1.2 Shanghai Blues. Film Workshop Co. Ltd (Hong Kong).

(as in 'I have had enough of Shanghai. So I bid it farewell. Farewell then, Shanghai!'). Put contextually, '*Zai Hui Ba*' thus expresses a certain finality that is more akin to the 'hard' farewell than the 'soft' good-bye.

There are two more clues on the *Zai Jian Shanghai* billboard which may suggest Tsui's parodic citation of the 1934 film. First, the name of the production company on the top right-hand corner of the bill looks vaguely like 'Lian Hua', the studio which produced *Zai Hui Ba Shanghai*. Second, although the surname of the actor who gets top billing is similarly out-of-focus, her name, Lingyu, is the same as the 'Lian Hua' star who plays Bai Lu. This star is none other than Ruan Lingyu, a sensation of the 1930s Shanghai movie world. Worth noting here is also the fact that Lian Hua was a well-known left-leaning studio from that era. During its life-span (1930–37), this studio had aimed to counter Hollywood's domination of the Chinese film market at the time, achieving some measure of success. Equally significant is the fact that Lian Hua was also the first to explicitly put Chinese nationalism onto the filmmaking agenda, believing that a nationalist-driven film industry could, among others, help lift China from the clutches of a semi-colonial subjugation. Accordingly, Lian Hua deployed the film-medium as a tool for advocating nationalist policies, for raising social consciousness and for directing the Chinese people to the nationalist universalism.[30]

The above two clues aside, the characterisation of Stool in *Shanghai Blues* has the shadowy ghost of Bai Lu. Both are country girls; they go to Shanghai, seeking a new life. Bai is a teacher; Stool applies for a teaching position. Bai is raped by a well-to-do doctor, while Stool is nearly raped by Boss, the rich merchant.

So if *Zai Jian Shanghai* is indeed a parodic reference to *Zai Hui Ba Shanghai*, it is as temporally incongruent with the diegetic setting of *Shanghai Blues* as *South Pacific* is because Lian Hua closed down in 1937 (consequent to the Japanese occupation of Shanghai), while Ruan Lingyu died some two years earlier. Anachronisms, whether temporal and spatial, are everywhere in *Shanghai Blues*; the most consistently blatant of which would be the use of Cantonese dialogue and Canto-pop style Mandarin songs throughout the film. They are at odds with the spatio-temporality of pre- and postwar Shanghai: Cantonese is not the *lingua França* of this city, while Mandarin songs with a 1980s 'Canto-pop' beat would be 'out-of-sync' with the music of that epoch. No less absurd is the particularly mischievous mix/mixing/mix-up seen in the film's publicity poster, which renders Do-Re-Mi, Shu-Shu and Stool as a glamour 'Chinese' jug band – tuxedo, evening dress and all (Figure 1.3).

In the film, this type of *mou lei tau* (nonsense) humour reaches a ridiculous height in the scene where Stool visits Do-Re-Mi while he gets ready for work early one morning. Presently he has found an odd-job as a walking Darkie toothpaste billboard. For this job, he paints his face black and dons a minstrel outfit – right down to the wig and top-hat. At one level, this minstrel-motif would serve a terse reminder to (past) American racism, when mapped



Figure 1.3 Publicity poster for *Shanghai Blues*. Film Workshop Co. Ltd (Hong Kong).

onto the historical context of the minstrel show, a once-fashionable 'indigenous form of American entertainment', in which 'white people in blackface' performed 'stereotypical comic skits, variety acts, dancing, and music'.[31] At another level, it draws attention to the Darkie toothpaste, a once-popular brand of oral care on this side of the Pacific. Reportedly inspired by Al Jolson of *The Jazz Singer* (dir. Alan Crosland, Warner Bros., 1927), Hawley & Hazel Chemical Company of Hong Kong brought out Darkie toothpaste in the 1920s, using a 'negro' face – thick lips and sparkling white teeth – with a top hat as the brand's logo. As the slogan on the billboard goes, Darkie keeps your mouth/teeth 'sweet-scented, while removing dirt' (Figure 1.4). In 1985 (the year after *Shanghai Blues* was made), Colgate bought over the brand and, bowing to Civil Rights Movement protest (primarily in the United States), renamed it Darlie soon after.[32] If the Darkie toothpaste referent here highlights an instance of racially offensive merchandising and packaging on the part of a colonial entrepreneur, then its manifestation in



Figure 1.4 Shanghai Blues. Film Workshop Co. Ltd (Hong Kong).

the film would seem to amount to a swipe at (Chinese) cultural ignorance, even insensitivity. At the same time, the film's particular mixing of the minstrel show and the Peking (Beijing) opera works to force open a performance space of the *mou lei tau* kind. This occurs when Do-Re-Mi as a 'Darkie' minstrel suddenly breaks into a Peking opera routine. Dragging Stool (her nose presently smeared with white makeup) outside his room, the two perform Peking opera on the roof top of their tenement block (Figure 1.4). Characterised by intricate double entendres, the *mou lei tau* visual gag here walks a fine line between racism (the minstrel show) and culturalism (the Peking opera). Painted faces in Peking opera symbolise personality attributes, for example, a black face is the mark of valour and integrity, while white markings on the face point to deception, cowardice and dishonesty; this is distinct to the minstrel's racial and racialised configurations.

The temporally dislocated movies, the spatially incongruent Cantonese, the spatio-temporally incompatible Mandarin songs, the tongue-in-cheek film poster, the *mou lei tau* humour and other conceptual twists and situational absurdities all point to parodic intent. The intent gives *Shanghai Blues* a certain critical speculative edge when it is mapped on a 'contestation of language'[33] and a 'formal analogue to the dialogue of past and present'.[34] In the context of *Shanghai Blues*, this mapping draws attention to the struggle between real time and its narration, between real space and its construction and between facts and their fictionalisation. It also brings to light the incommensurability of these 'betweens': their clarification and confusion. 'Facts' (e.g. the actual social-political turbulence of postwar Shanghai) thus vie with 'fiction' (*Shanghai Blues*' construction of postwar mayhem in Shanghai in hyperbolic and comical ways), as the 'past' (*Zai Hui Ba Shanghai*), 'present' (*Shanghai Blues*) and 'future' (*South Pacific*) clash and converge in spatio-temporally ambivalent localities that range from the

East (Shanghai/Hong Kong) to other locations that fall in and between the East–West divide (Hong Kong-*Shanghai Blues*/Shanghai-*Zai Hui Ba Shanghai*/Hollywood-*South Pacific*). In the intercultural realm, this fact–fiction contestation also circumscribes a discourse of historical ignorance and cultural indifference (the minstrel show/the Peking opera).

In *Shanghai Blues*, the application of parody as a narrative tool helps pry open the boundaries of film genres, be they of the classic Shanghai or Hollywood variety, in favour of genre mixing, while its political significance would be this: as we shall presently see, parody gives vent to heterologies by intercepting, intervening and interrupting hegemonic forces, such as Western colonialisms, American neo-imperialism, and Chinese nationalism. In other words, the film's parody circumscribes an antagonistic and agonistic arena in which is found dispersed yet intersecting vectors of dialogic intensity and dialectical might, power and resistance, similarities and differences, tensions and displacements, reversals and dislodgments, past and present, 'self' and 'other', and fact and fantasy.

The *South Pacific* billboard abounds with fantasy ingredients of the 'Orientalist-esque' type. It has coconut palms, exotic islands, sunshine, clear blue skies and local girls in sarongs, some shaking their hips invitingly. Against this background is a couple: a local girl and a white man. He is a navy man, and so has an occupation; the girl does not. The two hold each other in an embrace, her head tilted at an angle, waiting to be kissed. This is 'proof' of his irresistible desirability and, of course, his prowess: the girl awaits his pleasure.[35]

South Pacific the movie has a pedigree genealogy. It is based on the long-running and multi-award winning Rodgers and Hammerstein Broadway musical of the same name (1949) which in turn is adapted from James A. Michener's Pulitzer Prize-winning book *Tales of the South Pacific* (1946).[36] The process of transformation from a best-selling prize-winning book into a Broadway hit, and then into an acclaimed Hollywood film testifies to a generative, constitutive and synthesising power of the postwar US economy of cultural (re)production, all making history by celebrating tales written by an insomniac American naval officer (Michener) who, during the US occupation of the South Pacific, 'two fingered' at an old typewriter at 11 each night in a Quonset hut, using a lantern for light and a mosquito bomb to ward off insects.[37] The continuing effect of this economy can be seen in Michener's recent illustrated children's book *South Pacific* (1992). This illustrated book makes clear Michener's endorsement of the musical: it 'creat[ed] a well-crafted drama with a beguiling heroine, a charismatic hero, and a rowdy bunch of sailors', 'produced a magical set of songs' and 'offered sharp dramatic and musical comment on one of American's critical problems, race relations'. Finally, Michener concludes that the musical has 'a mix of realism and fantasy that could rarely be equaled'.[38]

To better understand Tsui Hark's parodic invocation of the Hollywood musical in *Shanghai Blues*, it is necessary to explore the 'mix' with respect to

'race relations' in regards to the *South Pacific* cultural industry a little further. In Michener's book, navy nurse Nellie Forbush, an Arkansas girl, falls in love with Emile de Becque the French planter-tycoon, but rejects his marriage proposal when she finds out that the never married Emile has sired eight daughters with various natives. For Nellie, '[A] man who had openly lived with a nigger was beyond the pale. Utterly beyond the bounds of decency'.[39] The musical removes this stigma from Emile by turning him into a widower with two children. It also transforms the French planter into an American patriot, occurring when he accepts a reconnaissance mission for the United States Marines, with the task of spying on the movements of Japanese ships in the South Pacific region. The musical thus redeems the somewhat imperfect Emile (in the book) and make him respectable. In marrying Emile, Nellie thus becomes stepmother to 'two sweet native children, the off-spring of a Polynesian woman and a European', and therefore not Emile's bastards.[40] For Michener, 'this is one of the unexpected virtues of *South Pacific*' [the musical], because Nellie 'solves the [race] problem by marrying her French planter and adopting his two half-Polynesian children'.[41] That which is being upheld here is, of course, postwar America's white middle-class values, its attendant cachet of moral standards, xenophobia and racism included.

Another related example: in the book, Lt. Joe Cable, a young middle-class Princeton man from Philadelphia, keeps his affair with Liat, a native girl, out of sight from his fellow Americans because he fears stigmatisation: 'Very few self-respecting American men would attempt to knock off a piece of jungle julep.'[42] Eventually Liat's mother exposes his cowardice and hypocrisy before his mates. In the stage musical, as well as the movie, Joe is similarly caught in the trap of his own prejudices and fears, but is spared a public humiliation. For a start, he does not love Liat – as Joe tells Nellie (in a duet): 'My Girl Back Home / I almost forgot / A blue eyed kid / I liked her a lot.' In the end, Joe is elevated to the status of a martyr of war; this happens during a reconnaissance mission (with Emile).

Indeed, Tsui's invocation of *South Pacific* to the film-scape of *Shanghai Blues* is anything but coincidental. In *South Pacific* the movie, France Nuyen plays Liat. Nuyen – named after the country of her birth[43] – is of French-Vietnamese ancestry (French mother, Vietnamese father). Like Tsui, she too was a child of the second French colonial empire period (1830–1962).[44] Both Tsui and Nuyen in turn are part of the Indochinese diaspora that ensued from the collapse of French-occupied Viet Nam Quoc (1804–1945), and later from the ravages of the Vietnam War (1955–73). Sometimes regarded as '[t]he second major Asian actress to become a star in Hollywood after Anna May Wong',[45] French-Vietnamese Nuyen has in fact spent almost all her adult life in the United States. Though some 12 years younger than Nuyen, Indochinese Tsui likewise has lived and worked outside his birth-country, including the United States where he used to make anti-racist/anti-Vietnam War films and videos for New York Third World

Newsreel (in the 1970s). *South Pacific* in *Shanghai Blues* thus speaks of and to the Vietnamese-French-American connection that Tsui and Nuyen have in common. Above all, the juxtaposition belies – in a corresponding way – anti-colonial sentiments and sensibilities.

If the allusions to French colonialisms and American imperialisms, before and after 1945, find only a fleeting glimpse in *Shanghai Blues*, then they are significantly less fleeting in *Dangerous Encounter – 1st Kind* (aka, *Don't Play with Fire*; Chinese title: *Di Yi Lei 'Xing' Wei Xian*; Cinefoto, 1980). Directed, scripted and edited by Tsui Hark, some four years before *Shanghai Blues*, this controversial Hong Kong production is an 'angry young man' sort of movie which pitches Hong Kong teenage delinquents against enterprising ex-soldiers, with tragic and fatal consequences.[46] The latter are American gun-runners who deal in left-over weaponry from the Vietnam War. Upon stumbling on this illicit trade inadvertently, the teenagers suddenly find themselves a target. The ensuing carnage leaves only one survivor; traumatised, the lone teenager goes mad. Tsui is to revisit this Hong Kong-Vietnam-American connection once more, with *A Better Tomorrow III: Love and Death in Saigon* (*Ying Xiong Ben Se III: Xi Yang Zhi Ge*, 1989). Set against the backdrop of war-ravaged Vietnam in the mad last days of the Vietnam War, with the Ho Chi Minh army advancing into Saigon and American soldiers on a retreat, this infinitely more explosive-laden and more violent film is, among other things, about civilians caught in the crossfire of wartime turmoil; a dystopia in which close friendship and family ties are often torn asunder in brutal ways.

The *South Pacific* billboard contains explicit references to American occupations in the South Pacific during and after World War II, but it also recalls, in both analogical and alluding ways, similar forms of imperialism that beset the Orient in the last century: French colonialism in Indochina, British colonialism in Hong Kong, 'treaty-port' colonialisms in mainland China, Japanese militarism in East and Southeast Asia, American neo-imperialism in post-World War II Vietnam, and so on and so forth. The analogies and allusions aside, the billboard also occasions an instance of parodic appropriation: upon seeing it, Do-Re-Mi's uncle exclaims excitedly that he wants to go to Nanyang, or the South Seas. Nanyang is a Chinese term for referring to the Southeast Asian region, home to many diasporic Chinese communities and settlements. Underscoring Tsui's wicked sense of irony, this mistaken association reeks of parody.

In *Shanghai Blues*, there are no coconut palms, exotic islands, and girls in sarongs, except for those painted on the bill. There are wiggling girls in shimmering cheongsams during show-time in the No Night City Cabaret however. In contradistinction to Nellie and her fellow-nurses, the cabaret girls do not sing about washing men right out of their hair. The closest corresponding scenario in *Shanghai Blues* would be when Shu-Shu gives an impromptu performance of 'washing' herself in a bubble-filled, clam-shaped bathtub at No Night City Cabaret. She actually finds herself in this situation

unexpectedly. A moment ago, she has intercepted a lout who tried to seduce an underage girl backstage. The lout's jealous girlfriend picks a fight with Shu-Shu instead, who ends up falling into the bathtub, a stage prop. Before she could recover from the fall, she is suddenly on stage with the bathtub, in the middle of a show. Mimicking a strip-tease, she then sings about the wonders of laughter. Not only does her act bring down the house, but she also catches the eye of a tycoon. Unlike Nellie, Shu-Shu sends her tycoon-suitor (Boss, that is) away, and makes sure he does not return. In stark contrast to *South Pacific*, the skies get overcast from time to time, and it rains occasionally in *Shanghai Blues*. On the other hand, like *South Pacific*, *Shanghai Blues* has war as its backdrop, love stories and song-and-dance routines which give the film a quasi-musical touch.

In fact, parodies and allusions exert an overwhelming presence in *Shanghai Blues*, and can be seen within seconds of the film's opening. In the prologue, and as mentioned in the above, every character is anonymous. There is a scene showing a local girl and a white man on the back seat of a jeep: they are on their way to the No Night City Cabaret for the night. Some Chinese sentries stop the jeep. A French flag flutters above and behind the sentries. One sentry-guard tells the white man about the curfew, and also informs him that the Japanese troops are on the outskirts of the city, preparing an offensive. 'So what?' sneers the white man, 'This is the French Concession. The Japanese won't dare attack us here. Out of my way!' Then he instructs his chauffeur to drive on. Orientalist images are simultaneously invoked and parodied here: an authoritative white man, his silent female companion and his invisible chauffeur. As expected in an Orientalist scenario, the sentries give way to the white subject.

The 'white man', the 'French Concession', the 'French flag', and the 'Japanese', these are all symbolic references to imperialist interests in Shanghai in 1937. Beginning in 1842 which saw China's session of the island of Hong Kong to Britain, the subsequent scramble for extraterritorial concessions by foreign powers soon turned Qing China into a sub-colony by the turn of the twentieth century. Like all extraterritorial districts in treaty ports, the 'French Concession' operated independently of Chinese laws and regulations. Besides France and Britain, the Qing rulers were forced to grant similar concessions to the United States, Russian, Japan, Italy, Germany and Austria.

Ten years on from the film's prologue, the *South Pacific* billboard in the Shanghai of 1947 reiterates the enduring presence of American imperialist interests in postwar China, and their pervasiveness elsewhere, including the South Pacific. American interventions in China's postwar politics came in a number of ways; most pertinent here would be the Truman administration's firm endorsement with regards to the reinstatement of Guomindang as the only legitimate government of postwar China, and its staunch support for Guomindang's policies to annihilate the CCP. These situations both contributed and led to the Chinese Civil War. It is by this drawing of connections

between American (neo-)imperialism and the *South Pacific* billboard that the *Zai Jian Shanghai* billboard in *Shanghai Blues* gains a political significance, albeit indirectly. As Stool makes a 180-degree around-turn in front of the billboard, she flicks her coat. Suddenly, the movie's frenzied pace halts. The subsequent freeze captures Stool in a confident posture: if the flick of coat amplifies her sense of confidence, then it also makes her look more defiant and determined. This frozen image allows for a contemplative moment (see Figure 1.2).

The freeze-shot brings to my mind, in both associative and intertextual ways, the final shot in Bruce Lee's *Fist of Fury* (*Jin Wu Men*; dir. Lo Wei, Golden Harvest, 1972; released in the United States under the title *The Chinese Connection*), which famously freezes Bruce Lee's character, Chen Zhen, in the mid-air, aiming a flying kick at his armed arresters.[47] Chen's arresters are portrayed as the villains of China, comprising white foreigners, Japanese secret police and Chinese traitors. (*Fist of Fury* is set in wartime Shanghai [1937–45].) As the film's closing song – sung to the beat of a military tattoo – makes clear, Chen's 'last stand' makes him a 'true hero' because he sacrifices his life for a nationalistic cause. This freeze-shot, together with the song, reverses an insult: Chen – and by extension the Chinese race – is the 'Sick Man of East Asia' no more.

Relative to Chen's, Stool's frozen poise conjures up the image of a different stand. In regards to Chinese nationalism, it seems ambivalent (it obviously lacks Chen's heroic martyrdom), exuding the 'heroism' of the everyday people instead – that worldly-wise disposition which has enabled everyday people to go about their lives, as if each day is a new day. Put contextually, Stool has cancelled the memory of two traumas (Do-Re-Mi's rejection of her love for him, and her separation from Do-Re-Mi and Shu-Shu), and is now ready to move on to a new phase in life, in turbulent Shanghai (a life without Do-Re-Mi and Shu-Shu, for example).

The freeze frame concurrently draws attention to the *Zai Hui Shanghai* billboard behind Stool, whose unmotivated appearance in the film-scape of *Shanghai Blues*, at this point in the diegetic time, suggests that *Zai Hui Shanghai* has replaced *South Pacific* as that city's current major film attraction (the anachronisms between fact and fiction notwithstanding). Presently, Stool is in the street, providing a stark contrast to the passive local girls of the *South Pacific* imaginary on the first billboard. As argued in the above, these girls, in functioning as sexual objects for the white (American) man, would cater to an 'Orientalist-esque' gaze. That white men – whether in the form of reel-life characters, or even that of a billboard caricature in a jeep – are absent in that freeze frame, also the final shot for the film's main story, is politically significant: it is as if the flick of coat which Stool executes, as she makes an around-turn, has – literally and figuratively – swept away white male fantasies for exotic places, from the South Pacific to Shanghai, and by extension, American neo-imperialism and Western Orientalism as well. *Zai Hui Shanghai. Zai Hui South Pacific. Zai Hui* American neo-imperialism,

Zai Hui Orientalism. That is to say, Stool's return look (at the city of Shanghai) unsettles hegemony.

Conclusion

Stool's return look at the city of Shanghai at the end of *Shanghai Blues* dovetails with the last key of the closing song. This song – also the film's theme song (given in the epigraph) – is composed by Do-Re-Mi and sung by Zhou Xiaoxian, a Zhou Xuan look-alike.[48] The latter character is an obvious throw to Zhou Xuan of the *Street Angel* (*Ma Lu Tian Shi*; dir. Yuan Muzhi, Mingxing Company, 1937) fame. As singer and actress, Zhou Xuan was an icon of the Chinese (Shanghai) cultural scene, before and after the Sino-Japanese War; *Shanghai Blues* is similar to *Street Angel* to the extent that both films are quasi-musicals that tell stories about the struggling 'Shanghai underclass', a world populated by musicians, prostitutes and other marginal people who live in dilapidated tenements. Doubling as a symbolic referent of a past era, in a reiterating way, the closing song additionally serves to reconnect the main story to the prologue. Its lyrics make the reconnection with words like 'bridge', 'embrace' and 'the other day', thereby giving a circular narrative structure to *Shanghai Blues*. This circularity – together with the term '*Zan Jian*' on the billboard, which variously means 'Goodbye', 'The End'[49] or 'To See Again', serving as an invitation to re-view the film – forces the film to fold back onto itself, making it self-referential and self-conscious in an introspective way.

The particular re-looping does not, however, send the film, from the first frame of the prologue to the last frame of the main story, into a perpetual loop with no escape button: fissures are made by the closing song's concurrent reference to a future time, for example, 'The I of tomorrow', 'The you of tomorrow', and 'embrace … again'. It is through these fissures that the final montage on to which the closing credits are superimposed emerges. This montage manifests a repetition with a difference as it repeats only particular moments from the main story. In so doing, it re-slots the film, both the prologue and the main story, into a past-future time frame, encouraging a critical re-visioning or remembering, in respective and retroactive ways. Significantly, in the montage, the *South Pacific* billboard, or what Bordwell would otherwise note as the 'reference point' in relation to Hollywood is absent, along with all references to foreign entities, including the 'white man' reference.

This type of repetition with a difference is akin to the Spivakian 'catachresal masterword'.[50] Put contextually, in invoking America, if symbolically understood as a hegemon of international affairs, the film also ensures its disappearance as such, at least insofar as the narrative space of *Shanghai Blues* is concerned. The particular disappearing act draws a parallel to the Abbasian *déjà disparu* analogically: that Hollywood enjoys no more than a transitory existence in the cultural spaces of Hong Kong movies, such as

Shanghai Blues. In this and other ways, the new localism of the (New) Hong Kong Cinema summons and constructs its presence in a world structured by hegemonic cultural forces on the one hand, and their fissures on the other. *Shanghai Blues* is thus no island unto itself, unconnected to the world of films from Hong Kong and the world at large, as well as the complex interconnectivity therein.

2 The heroic flux in John Woo's trans-Pacific passage

From Confucian brotherhood to American selfhood

Aaron Han Joon Magnan-Park

> In my films, the heroes use their strong will and discipline to combat the [*sic*] violence and injustice. It is through the [*sic*] violence that I show the real qualities of a human.
>
> (John Woo)[1]

Hong Kong's film industry entered the global cinematic limelight with the unexpected success of the *gongfupian* (kung fu film) with Bruce Lee as its key superstar. However, the 'kung fu craze'[2] of the early 1970s came to an abrupt end when Bruce Lee passed away in 1973 under unfortunate circumstances. Thereafter, the Hong Kong film industry struggled unsuccessfully to regain its global audience with a series of Bruce Lee clones. Against this backdrop, the Hong Kong New Wave reinvigorated the film industry in 1979 with a combination of overseas film school training, a passion to reinterpret and update Hong Kong's cinematic and cultural heritage, and a desire to assert Hong Kong's collective identity. Directors like Ann Hui, Tsui Hark, and Allen Fong engaged in challenging the cinematic and ideological classicalism of the older generation and received international film festival accolades in recognition for their achievements. Yet, when it comes to continuing the action cinema tradition of the *gongfupian* set to a more contemporary setting, the key Hong Kong director that emerged during the Hong Kong New Wave did not have any formal film school training at all but rather entered the film industry under the more traditional route of studio apprenticeship. Under this light, John Woo was more akin to those studio-based *auteurs* that the French New Wave directors cited in their *auteur* studies for *Cahiers du cinéma* such as Alfred Hitchcock, Howard Hawks, and John Ford.

In 1969, John Woo entered Hong Kong's studio system by first working at Cathay before moving to Shaw Brothers, Golden Harvest, and, later, the production companies Cinema City and Film Workshop. Of the many relationships that John Woo formed during his film career, it was the mentorship he received from Chang Cheh (Zhang Che) as his assistant director at Shaw Brothers that is the most important since it was Chang Cheh who cultivated

John Woo's entry into film directorship. Additionally, John Woo's action aesthetics is a modernisation and modification of Chang Cheh's signature *yanggang* (staunch masculinity) approach to cinematic action and heroics. Chang Cheh was, along with King Hu, the leading director of the 'new school martial arts movement' where physical realism was given a new enhanced cinematic priority. Unlike King Hu, Chang Cheh was more interested in promoting *yanggang* where a young male protagonist, in the prime of his martial virility, exhibits his alpha male status against numerous opponents in a heroic bloodbath complete with the gore inflected details of his martial prowess. Chang Cheh favoured the overtly tragic protagonist who, despite receiving multiple grave mortal wounds, engaged in a final '*dance macabre*'[3] – an additional bravura spurt of heroic martial virility whereupon the hero accepts the inevitability of his impending death but not before taking with him into the next world his numerous and prominent opponents. Predictably, this is the most 'over-the-top' moment within a Chang Cheh film since the heroic protagonist exhibits superhuman and even inhuman obsessiveness in personifying *yanggang in extremis*. While Chang Cheh's *auteur* obsessions with *yanggang* was popular with Hong Kong youth who wanted to break away from traditional Confucian ethics and its corresponding interpersonal rules of human propriety, critics such as Tian Yan lambasted Chang Cheh for transplanting *yanggang* from the feudal past in films such as the *One-Armed Swordsman* trilogy (1967, 1968, 1971) to the contemporary period in films such as *Chinatown Kid* (1977).[4]

While an acknowledged disciple of the Chang Cheh school of action heroism, John Woo's directorial career is not exclusively limited to the action cinema. John Woo is a versatile director who first achieved box-office success in Hong Kong with a Cantonese opera film in 1976, *Princess Chang Ping*, and a year later with a comedy, *Money Crazy*. By the time he shifted to contemporary action films in 1986 with *A Better Tomorrow*, John Woo had a series of box-office failures, which nearly ended his film career in Hong Kong. It was under the good graces of Tsui Hark and his Film Workshop that John Woo had a chance to attain international *auteur* status with what became known as 'heroic bloodshed' films. Stylistically, a John Woo action film became synonymous with the Mexican stand off, double revolver shooting sequences without much concern for counting bullets realism, slow motion graceful lunges that assist in avoiding bullets but do not interfere with marksmanship, shootouts within a cathedral, and flying non-predatory birds. Thematically, John Woo's films centred on the parallel construction of initial protagonists and antagonists who end up as two sides of the same coin and through the course of the narrative becoming one under a shared heroic principle. A number of these elements have become *de rigueur* for inclusion in contemporary action films to claim *bona fide* action film status. In Hollywood, John Woo continues to work within the action genre while simultaneously expressing in numerous interviews his desire to direct musicals and to distance himself from his action director only status.

John Woo's heroic bloodshed films are cinematic meditations on the concept of the *yingxiong* (hero). They are modernised forms of Chang Cheh's *wuxiapian* (Chinese fantastical swordplay films with a chivalrous knight-errant protagonist) with guns replacing swords and other hand-held weapons associated with the pre-firearm world. It isn't a surprise that Chang Cheh's 'new style' sensibilities underwent modernisation in John Woo's choreographed ballistic ballet films to better reflect contemporary Hong Kong where the traditional notions of *xia* (chivalry) and *yi* (righteousness) continue to define the *yingxiong* (hero) with many of the *yanggang* features still intact. While former studies of John Woo's gun fu films focused on his cinematic influences,[5] his distinctive and often mimicked action stylistics, and even on the sentimental male bondings that are so prominent in his films,[6] I will focus on the culture-bound function of friendship that divides his six Hong Kong action films up until *Hard Boiled* in 1992 from those six that are made thereafter in Hollywood, starting with *Hard Target* in 1993.

If Gertrude Stein's famous line 'A rose is a rose is a rose' is applied to friendship, the statement 'Friendship is friendship is friendship' would in and of itself appear self-explanatory. However, the tautological rationale of 'is-ness' neglects to address the connotative factors behind a word and its rich cultural linguistic heritage that it invokes. In the case of John Woo's oeuvre, his narrative trope of friendship and its link to the *yingxiong* undergoes a radical transformation once he takes the Pacific Passage from Hong Kong to Hollywood. While a universal chivalrousness may indeed exist,[7] its social function within a given society does not remain equally universal. Within Hong Kong's Sinocentric universe, friendship is politicised to Confucianism and with it, a final possibility of social redemption via a bottom-up restoration of Confucian social legitimacy. Once John Woo enters Hollywood's corridors, his Sinocentric ideology of friendship is modified to fit with the demands of American individualism and its own tradition of singular heroics. Thus, a heroics of more than one becomes a heroics of just one, and with it the devaluation of politicised friendship's centrality in John Woo's oeuvre.

Confucian ethics

Chinese civilisation is grounded on Confucianism, which is an anthropocentric moral philosophy designed to create peace and harmony for the Middle Kingdom. The moral foundation of Confucianism was not just limited to interpersonal relationships but also extended to the political realm since it was imperative for the ruler to be the moral exemplar for his subjects to emulate in their daily lives. Confucius[8] (551–479 BC) formulated his thoughts on a Sinocentric self-civilising mission at a period of Chinese history where the single dynastic system unifying greater China was contested rather than secured. Confucius' lifetime coincided with the Spring and Autumn Period (770–476 BC) and the Warring Period (475–221 BC).

These were periods of dynastic contestation prior to the founding of the Qin Dynasty in 221 BC by Shi Huangdi and the formation of a greater unified China.

Confucius' ultimate objective was to promote a mode of daily praxis at all levels of society that would restore the dynastic order in China with a ruler who would practise benevolence over his people and allow the Mandate of Heaven to guarantee a state of secular utopian bliss for the Chinese people. While Confucius did not live long enough to see his philosophy achieve its ultimate civilising and political mission, it was formally adopted as state orthodoxy during the Han Dynasty (206 BC–AD 220) by Emperor Wu (141–87 BC) and found its way to almost all of China's neighbours, with continual influence up to the present day in places like Korea, Japan, Vietnam, Singapore, and even Communist China.[9] In fact, to a large measure, being civilised in the Sinocentric universe meant adopting Confucianism as one of the key cultural components of becoming less of a 'barbarian'. Based on a historical framework, Confucius sought inspiration in the past and thus it was the legendary Emperor Yao (2357–2198 BCE) and the Zhou Dynasty (1100–1770 BCE) along with the existing four classics the *Book of Changes*, the *Book of Odes*, the *Book of History*, and the *Book of Music* that guided him.

Confucius sought to understand the *Dao* (the Way) in such a way that *de* (virtue, moral power, potency) could be nurtured, enhanced, and become the basic ingredient of everyday life. Central to his philosophy was *ren* (humanity, goodness, benevolence). As a written Chinese character, *ren* is a combination of the person radical and the number two as its root. Thus, *ren* foregrounds the interpersonal relationship between two individuals and depends on a combination of *li* (rites, rituals, propriety) and *yi* (rightness, duty, fittingness) to create social harmony via the proper enactment of moral etiquette. These human relationships were formalised in the five virtues of 'courtesy, tolerance, good faith, diligence, [and] generosity. [Collectively, c]ourtesy wards off insults; tolerance wins all hearts; good faith inspires the trust of others; diligence ensures success; generosity confers authority upon others'.[10]

These five virtues were in turn codified into five hierarchal relationships between a senior member and his junior where the burden of moral edification was placed on the senior. Mencius (371–289 BC) voiced this received praxis as initiated by the legendary Sage (Emperor Shun) and endorsed by Emperor Yao. The five human relations included, in descending order, ruler to minister, husband to wife, father to son, elder brother to younger brother, and between friends.[11]

At heart, it is possible that every member of society could become a *junzi* (a superior person). Originally, *junzi* was limited to the son of a ruler or an aristocrat but under Confucius' egalitarian vision, each member of society could attain this designation and ideally, should at the very least aspire to become a *junzi*. When the senior member of each relationship acts in accordance with Confucian principles as a *junzi* personfied, he becomes a

moral exemplar and his virtuous life will then serve as a model of emulation for the junior partner. As each level of the five human relationships is completed in its totality, peace and harmony within the social fabric of the nation can be attained and perpetuated. The highest burden of responsibility fell on the ruler since proper conduct legitimised his position as the political head of his empire and with it, the Mandate of Heaven.

The concept of Chinese martial heroics adheres to these Confucian ideals. Both gendered versions of martial prowess, the *wuxia* (male knight-errant) and *xianu* (female knight-errant),[12] inhabited the pages of China's literary past prior to its reincarnation on the silver screen. James Liu characterises the key components of the traditional *wuxia* to include the high ideals of altruism, justice, individual freedom, personal loyalty, courage, truthfulness, mutual faith, honour, fame, generosity, and a healthy contempt for wealth.[13] While the Confucian scholar preferred to settle a dispute with an apposite four-character quote from an ancient text, the *wuxia* accepted the fact that there were times when skill at arms was the only option. John Woo's redemptive trope accepts the *wuxia* mind frame to see violence not only as a means for injustice but more importantly as a necessary last means for the restoration of justice.

Despite Hong Kong's status as a British Crown Colony from 1842 to 1997 when Hong Kong was officially transferred back to the Peoples' Republic of China as a Special Administrative Region (SAR), it operated within a cultural environment that prescribed to this basic Confucian framework, especially for its Han Chinese ethnic majority. Nevertheless, Hong Kong's status as a British Crown Colony provided a wrinkle to this basic Confucian social political doctrine since the titular political head was not an ethnic Chinese, did not adopt Sinocentric values as did China's former non-Han Chinese rulers – the Mongol Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368) and the Manchu Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) – and operated within a British model of imperial glory where the local indigenous population was intentionally disenfranchised from the political arena. In this context, the first level of the Confucian five human relationships, namely ruler to minister, was vacant. With this structural vacancy came a destabilising force to the vertical model of a Confucian secular utopia and brought into question the ethical possibility of a just and moral society.[14]

Colonial Hong Kong is usually described as a metropolitan *entrepôt* where political disenfranchisement was compensated by *laissez-faire* capitalism. Hong Kong became synonymous with the 'profits before politics' mind frame since the possibility of substantial capital gain and the celebration of the miraculous meteor rise of tycoons were celebrated as proof positive of this depoliticised social contract. With Confucianism and *wuxiadao* (the *wuxia* code) in open disdain by *laissez-faire* capitalism's *modus operandi* of placing economic profits as the single most important social imperative, the Chinese heart of Hong Kong society was threatened of its moral and philosophical anchor. Despite this threat, Confucian values were constantly

revalidated as a structuring motive to explain the economic miracle of the Asian tigers such as Hong Kong and they continue to influence the quotidian acts of Hong Kong's ethnic Han Chinese population.

The economic and political basis for Hong Kong identity and praxis then threatened the very foundation of Confucianism as the governing civilising fact of 'Chineseness' and with it, 'Hong Kongeseness'. Yet John Woo's heroic bloodshed films sought to restore this Confucian moral order within a compromised social environment by enacting a bottom-top restoration of the very Confucian values that were threatened by Hong Kong's depoliticised reality. Here, John Woo distances himself from the creative limitations of working in Hong Kong where it was 'impossible to do anything political'[15] by doing something political with his films. As John Woo himself got closer to his own emigration from Hong Kong to Hollywood, his films shifted progressively from the concerns of father to son, to that of elder brother to younger brother, and finally to that of friend to friend without any familial blood ties – the fifth and lowest level of Confucius' five human relationships.

Friendship as brotherhood and the community of heroes

Liu Shu-Hsien differentiates Confucianism into three distinct but mutually interlinked forms: spiritual, politicised, and popular.[16] According to Liu, *spiritual* Confucianism is the focal point of intellectual debates concerning Confucius' original statements and those of his disciples, including Neo-Confucianists. *Politicised* Confucianism encompasses the official ideologies adopted by the dynasties to legitimise their rule and impose social order with borrowings from non-Confucian schools of thought such as Daoism and Legalism. Finally, *popular* Confucianism is the vernacular adoption of Confucian ideals such as filial piety and the importance of education by the common people. John Woo's ideology of friendship works on the popular level to critique the political and restore the spiritual.

It may come across as ironic that John Woo's pro-Confucian ideology of friendship occurs in narratives that foreground Triads. This irony could even be misconstrued as perplexing given that John Woo is a self-professed pacifist (he has not studied martial arts and has never fired a real gun), devout Lutheran, and all around nice family man who did not relish the memories of witnessing the violence and the fatal outcomes of this violence that was part of his quotidian experience as a child growing up in Hong Kong. As China's version of organised crime, these underground Triads originated as secret societies, most notably the Hung Society, intent on restoring ethnic Han Chinese rule under the motto, 'Overthrow the [Manchu] Qing, Restore the [Han Chinese] Ming'. This mythic rhetoric of genesis still structures some of the rationale that Triads invoke to legitimise their continued existence. Paralleling Chinese society's preference for hierarchies, Triads model themselves along familial lines that are reminiscent of Confucius' five human

relationships. Like all organisations, Triads contain within their designation a continuum of Triad possibilities – those that make the authority's most wanted list as well as those who could even be deemed benevolent in their activities reminiscent of Robin Hood and his Merry Men. What matters is not so much the ethical foundation for or against the existence of Triads but rather their ideological function within John Woo's films of heroic bloodshed.

By definition, joining a Triad would in itself contradict Confucian ethics. However, the criminal underground is part of society and can at times serve as a fruitful locale for social critique of the aboveground world. It goes without saying that if a Confucian *junzi* exists, he should proliferate in the non-criminal world. Conversely, when searching for models of a *yingxiong*, then the Triads offer an ideal environment where an exacting Darwinian logic of competition in a perpetual game of survival produces numerous opportunities for intense battles and multiple acts of deception and betrayal. Add to this the constant conflict between law enforcement and the Triads and you have a natural Manichean world of the 'good' in eternal struggle for dominance against its diametrical opposite. While John Woo has his share of *yingxiong* characters personifying the very highest ideals in law enforcement, there is an equally compelling set of even more surprising *yingxiong* characters who are part of the Triads. In fact, these Triad *yingxiong* embody an unexpected *junzi* dimension that transforms them from 'wise guys' to guys who are, in fact, wise.

Ackbar Abbas identifies Hong Kong society as the *déja disparu* – the already disappeared.[17] Abbas makes this cultural observation based on the political fact of 1997 and Hong Kong's countdown mania that began with the 1984 Joint Declaration. It is a hyper postmodern condition of rapid change where the speed of change is extreme enough that the disappearance occurs before one is even cognisant of the event's passing. Abbas' idea of the *déja disparu* is in tune with John Woo's own nostalgic desire to cling to past values that must still matter. Consequently, his meditation on the ideology of friendship is not just cultural commentary but contains a direct political side calling for one constant within the maelstrom of changes. In this framework, characters such as Mark in *A Better Tomorrow* and Jeff in *The Killer* are much more than mere underling lieutenants, professional assassins, and charismatic Triad poster models. These characters embody the very essence of not only the *yingxiong* but also the Confucian *junzi* in the most unlikely of places. Through their acts, these characters revalidate the importance of Confucianism and with them one final endorsement of Confucianism as the underlying structure that must be preserved for Hong Kong society to retain its inherent self-civilising mission. In other words, in a society where the ethical trickle down theory is compromised at the very top, then it is the final level of friendship where the slippery slope of no return is arrested to prevent the complete demise of Confucianism and with it, the foundational definition of what it means to be civilised within a Sinocentric framework.

John Woo's journey to international *auteur* recognition begins with *A Better Tomorrow*. Released in 1986, it is his most straightforward Confucian morality tale since it foregrounds all of the five human relations outside of the topmost tier, ruler to minister, in a redemptive reaffirmation of Confucianism as a guarantor for social harmony. Of the remaining four human relations, it is the three phallocentric interpersonal dynamics involving father to son, elder brother to younger brother, and friend to friend that structure the diegesis.[18] The mother is notably absent. In this light, John Woo replicates Chang Cheh's preference for male-centred narratives that require self-sacrifice and even self-martyrdom as the concluding act of *yanggang in extremis*. However, John Woo differentiates himself from his mentor by linking the act of sacrifice to the continuation of the family bloodline since he concludes his film with the remaining Confucian human relationship, the only heterosexual one, between husband and wife.

The hospitalised father has two sons, Ho and Kit. Ho, the elder of the two, is also a Triad *dage* (*dailo* in Cantonese, elder brother) involved in counterfeiting American currency. While Ho's father knows of his activities, his younger brother Kit doesn't. Kit chooses law enforcement and thus there is already a schism between the two brothers that will explode as they find each other on opposing sides of the law. In keeping with Confucian ethics, the father requests from Ho that he give up his criminal activities for the sake of his younger brother, but this is a request that cannot be easily granted. The existing conflicts within the nuclear family are replicated within the Triad's surrogate family structure. Ho is betrayed by his Triad *xiaodi* (younger brother) Shing who also betrays their Triad boss, Mr Yiu, to become the top member of their Triad syndicate. For Ho, both family structures have failed him and thus he undergoes imprisonment and a compromised life upon his release. He has lost his father, alienated himself from his brother, attempts a life away from his Triad associates, and is generally adrift on his own reconnaissance.

Despite the failure of the expected familial obligations to sustain him, Ho finds solace and solidarity with his former Triad associate and friend Mark who has also entered into hard times. Mark suffered a debilitating shot to the leg that left him with a limp. He is also surviving on the streets, debasing himself to serve as Shing's impromptu car attendant for some begrudged pocket change. While both Ho and Mark believed themselves to be completely alone in the world, their reunion re-sparks their *yingxiong* convictions. It is a friendship of sustained loyalty when all former bonds of loyalty based on familial connections have evaporated. Together they decide to rectify matters by bringing Shing to justice, both personally and legally. In the course of their efforts, they face one final showdown with Shing and his cohorts at a dock. In the ensuing hail of bullets, Mark is given a chance to save himself. While Mark at first agrees and begins to steer his boat away from the action, he decides to return and remain at Ho's side. The two vanquish their foes, but not without Mark's death and Ho's self-reincarceration.

Before Mark is killed, he reiterates to Kit the absolute sanctity of bloodlines as the overriding principle. In effect, Mark restores Confucian relationships first with his friendship to Ho, which in turn catalyzes the reconciliation between the two estranged brothers. This then guarantees the future for Kit and his spouse, Jackie. In other words, Mark's sacrifice in the name of friendship restores not only the final level of familial relationship (between brothers), but also makes possible the continuation of the next generation (between spouses). Mark's sacrifice is absolute since his own bloodline ends with his death.

The 1987 sequel continues to reinforce the possibility of a Triad *yingxiong* exhibiting Confucian *junzi* sensibilities by immortalising Mark and reincarnating Mark through Ken, his non-Triad twin. Mark's martyrdom in the name of a Confucian future is immortalised as a fact and celebrated within popular memory through a *bande dessinée* detailing the story of Mark, Ho, and Kit. His unofficial shrine also displays his trench coat with over 40 bullet holes and his sunglasses. These are the accoutrements that Ken claims as his birthright when he returns to Hong Kong from New York City to help Uncle Lung and Ho undo the machinations that their former Triad brothers have initiated. Both Uncle Lung and Ho have given up their Triad lives and are working with Kit in his police investigation. While Ken has lived a non-Triad life away from Hong Kong, he retains those Triad skills that his twin perfected and deploys them as needed but with judicious restraint. All this changes when Kit is killed and the remaining three, Uncle Lung, Ho, and Ken willingly face impossible odds and the inevitability of their own mortality by wiping out their former Triad peers. In the resulting bloodbath, all three receive multiple gunshot injuries. Rather than attempting an escape, they await the arrival of the police, foregoing urgent medical attention, in order to lay claim to the nobility of their actions. It is an extreme example of the power of friendship to rectify an injustice and restore the sanctity of a Confucian world order.

By the time *The Killer* is released in 1989, John Woo presents a Confucian world order in crisis by focusing exclusively on male friendships – the lowest rung of Confucius' five human relationships. Both Confucianism and *wuxiadao* value loyalty. Humility is also promoted with public recognition of one's feats considered a vanity. Nevertheless, the recognition of one's deeds does require reaffirmation by another. In *The Killer*, Li provides the gaze of recognition in a series of revelations about Jeff and through this process regains his own abandoned *junzi* sensibilities. Jeff and Li lead parallel lives as each undergoes his own orphaning. Their surrogate professional families turn against them and their most trusted colleague dies in the line of duty. Nevertheless, they find strength in their spontaneous friendship and through this friendship restore the promise of a Confucian moral order by rebuilding it from the bottom up. Their equality as *yingxiong* is confirmed by the Mexican standoff and cemented in an oscillating graphic match when Li sits on Jeff's chair and relives the events of the ambush exactly as Jeff had done previously.

To claim that Jeff, *the* killer of the film, is a paradigm of the Confucian *junzi* should not be met with great scepticism since being a hired independent *yingxiong* assassin should not automatically disqualify him from embodying a Confucian moral exemplar, despite the unlikeliness of the scenario. But, like the trope of the 'prostitute with a golden heart', Jeff is revealed to be an 'assassin with a golden heart'. His radical emotive transformation is not that transformative once his strict professional code of not involving the innocent is respected to the letter. Thus it comes as no surprise that he expresses remorse for accidentally blinding Jenny, goes out of his way to complete one final assignment to secure the funds for her expensive overseas eye operation, and in the event that a proper donor cannot be located, he volunteers his own corneas. Furthermore, Jeff endangers his cover by rescuing a girl while being pursued by the police and Triad. Due to Jeff's sincere concern for the wounded girl, Li sees his face and begins a determined chase to capture him out of professional duty as well as personal curiosity in having discovered a *junzi* within the Triad hornet's nest. The final shootout in the cathedral serves as the moment of mutual confirmation of their *yingxiong* accolades, complete with *junzi* sensibilities, as Jeff and Li decimate their opposition on behalf of Jenny. In contrast to a Hollywood happy ending, their efforts are compromised by Jeff's death and damaged eyes and Li's re-orphaned status. However, this ending is not inherently tragic since it demonstrates the possibility of a redemptive friendship as a catalyst to reaffirm the sanctity of the Confucian moral order where sincere intent outweighs insincere achievement.

John Woo's remaining three Hong Kong films, *A Bullet in the Head* (1990), *Once a Thief* (1991), and *Hard Boiled* (1992) continue his meditation on friendship, adding further endorsements on behalf of Confucian ethics. *A Bullet in the Head* reiterates the Confucian caution against the pursuit of wealth with a narrative that destroys the most perfect of friendships – that of a lifelong friendship cemented from the earliest of childhood days. Whereas the trio of friends in *A Better Tomorrow II* established the unlimited possibilities that loyal friendship could facilitate, the trio of friends in *A Bullet in the Head* sees this same possibility undermined by one individual's willingness to place gold before the sanctity of friendship. The trio of friends, Frank, Ben, and Paul, grew up in the same tough neighbourhood together where no day passed without a shared bonding experience. In an act of deep camaraderie, Frank uses his parent's deed on their apartment as collateral for an illegal loan to finance Ben's wedding. This selfless act sets off a chain reaction as Frank is robbed and the fatal revenge he gains with Ben against Ringo make them wanted criminals. The three friends opt to secure a fast fortune in Vietnam to repay their debts. Caught in the whirlwind of the Vietnam War, their friendship is tainted as Paul increasingly places the accumulation of wealth as his overriding concern. Luke, the Amerasian undercover CIA operative, serves as a foil to the compromised Paul. Whereas Luke comes to the trio's rescue from a brutal North Vietnamese

prison camp, Paul uses the same event to save himself at the expense of Frank. Despite the fact that Frank came to rescue Paul, Paul shoots his childhood friend in the head as a means to silence his cries of pain as the North Vietnamese edge closer to their hidden location. This cowardly act sets off its own chain of events as Frank survives the event to become a drug dependent assassin plagued by the pain of the imbedded bullet in his brain. Paul returns to Hong Kong where the box of gold ingots secures his financial wellbeing. It is Ben who, in his commitment to the highest ideals of loyal friendship, mercifully shoots Frank and returns to Hong Kong with his skull to confront and destroy Paul's unwise gains. Paul's greed effectively eradicated his *wuxia* status and with it, their 'three Musketeer' oath of perpetual friendship. With friendship thus betrayed, so too is social justice since justice on the personal level is a Pyrrhic victory.

Once a Thief is a departure from John Woo's usual tragic ending because here, friendship survives a love triangle and thrives in an amicable domesticated triangle anchored by loyalty. While there is no doubt concerning the trio's loyalties to each other, Cherie's presence sparks a love triangle which gets complicated, in the following ways: first, Joe 'dies' before Cherie and Joe can marry. Cherie then settles for Jim. Now pregnant with Jim's child, Cherie discovers that Joe is still alive. Their friendship can survive this convoluted turn of events because the root of their unhappiness is their surrogate father who rescued the trio from the streets and taught them pilfering skills to enrich his own economic agenda. The youthful street trio is good at heart since they steal in order to share with other unfortunates. Through fratricide, a false bloodline is replaced by a proper bloodline and with it, domestic bliss. In such an environment, Jim willingly plays exclusive uncle to the infant. Here, loyal friendship respectful of marital vows does deliver on the Confucian promise since the trio never surrendered their *junzi* core.

The centrality of an exclusive male friendship as a guarantor of enhanced *yingxiong* possibilities and the insurance of a just order is again highlighted in *Hard Boiled*. This time, the stakes are not just personal or limited to one individual but rather enlarged to represent a microcosm of society's need for protection. In this film, the loss of one's friend and the ensuing existential downfall initiates the narrative. Tequila is unable to protect his partner during the opening fusillade. Moreover, he inadvertently shoots an undercover policeman in a brutal manner. Incensed by these professional oversights, Tequila antagonises his peers, supervisor, and love interest. He recovers his sense of self only upon befriending Tony, another deep undercover policeman. Society's precarious situation is symbolised by the transformation of a hospital into a secret arms cache. The hospital's staff and patients, including the physically disabled and newborn infants, are caught in the resulting carnage between the police and Wong's associates. Taking the initiative, Tony and Tequila demonstrate their *yanggang* dispositions, Tony by risking self-electrocution in bypassing an electronic lock, and

Tequila by using public humiliation as a ruse to shoot a gloating Wong. Within the hospital's corridors, Tequila and Tony systematically clear out one ward after another in a majestic tactical tango. Encompassing a full 45 minutes of screen time, this battle is a *tour de force* trial by fire. In the pursuit of the higher good, the accidental shooting of a policeman is acceptable, but not the harming of any of the patients as demonstrated by the extreme measures that are undertaken by Hong Kong's equivalent of America's SWAT team to rescue the infants, and Tony's pause of honour with Mad Dog when they find themselves separated by a roomful of physically compromised patients. While a single *yingxiong* is better than none, two are preferred for they restore the jaded *junzi* within, and with it, a revalorisation of the historical and cultural moorings for a Sinocentric universe.

Heroic individualism and the eclipse of friendship

With six heroic bloodshed masterpieces under his belt, John Woo responded to Hollywood's hail. Hollywood interpolated John Woo with the alluring prospects of distancing himself from the inevitability of 1997, full access to its resource-rich environment, and the possibility of developing his action aesthetics in a land where the ability to bear arms is a basic constitutional right. On the one hand, his arrival excited many in the industry. On the other, there was a cautionary reluctance from some producers and studio heads to allow John Woo full creative license. This shyness emanated from the fact that while John Woo was invited on account for his *auteur* action aesthetics, he could not replicate nor enhance his signatory bravura for fear of alienating America's mainstream audience. This is doubly ironic since American directors such as Robert Rodriguez and Quentin Tarantino have liberally inflected their own action aesthetics with many of John Woo's stylistics to become action *auteurs* in their own right. Instead, John Woo's work underwent Americanisation to 'better' accommodate the mainstream domestic market. Under this process, while many of his stylistic conventions were replicated with added special effects *ad nauseam* to the point of self-pastiche, this slick sleight of hand attempt to 'guarantee' its John Woo pedigree did so by dropping the trope of friendship tied to Confucian ethics.

The United States and Hong Kong share an Anglophone colonial past. Nevertheless, unlike Hong Kong, the United States enjoys independent nation status topped with solo superpower supremacy. Full political legitimacy brings with it the added comfort of social stability. This in turn makes the pursuit of individual happiness possible since collective happiness is largely guaranteed by the nation. Thus Ackbar Abbas' assessment of Hong Kong as the *déja disparu* does not apply. If anything, the United States personifies the *jamais disparaissant* (the never disappearing). Under this framework, friendship is not tasked to restore faith in society for the individual, but rather to restore faith in the individual within that society. In

the United States, Confucius' uppermost relationship, ruler to minister, is a given. This Sinocentric model is then Americanised with an additional human relationship, the sixth and most overriding relationship of the individual to the self.

In John Woo's six American films, his ideology of friendship now serves the needs of the single heroic individual whose challenge is to actualise his untapped and unknown heroic potential. This is largely due to the fact that the scripts come searching for John Woo rather than his former practice of exerting creative control and input into the script. Thus the requisite Hollywood 'happy ending' where the trope of 'every man' heroic self-actualisation is rewarded with heterosexual romance, private satisfaction, and economic self-sufficiency overwhelms the narrative. Of course, this added baggage negates the possibility of a tragic conclusion. Additionally, the happy ending reaffirms the inherent goodness of the pre-existing American system where villainy is the exception to the rule. Under the Hollywood touch, such moral ambiguities are arrested and the inevitability of good triumphing over evil is a guaranteed necessity despite the end of the Production Code. This simple Manichean binary reduces John Woo's richer thematic deliberations and denies them the level of complex depth that is his trademark.

The six American films in question are *Hard Target* (1993), *Broken Arrow* (1996), *Face/Off* (1997), *Mission Impossible 2* (2000), *Windtalkers* (2002), and *Paycheck* (2003).[19] These six films disrupt the key established Hong Kong theme of a group of heroes in favour of the singular hero. In *Hard Target*, Chance is the only one who has the pre-existing skills and mental acumen to beat the human hunters. All of his allies are past their prime, like Douvee and Elijah, or still in development, like Natasha. It is the trope of the lone avenger that is racialised and sexualised with Chance embodying the 'Great White American Hero'. Elijah is his ethnic buddy[20] and Natashya, the damsel in distress. At no moment in the narrative is there a heroic equal that can befriend and co-operate with Chance. This same pattern of singular heroics is repeated in *Face/Off* and *Paycheck*. In *Broken Arrow* and *Mission Impossible 2*, competent female characters exist but they are far from being equals to the male protagonist. *Windtalkers* reduces heroic development to a suicidal fantasy due to war survivor's guilt. It redeems itself when Enders, contrary to his standing orders, sacrifices his life so that Yahzee does not succumb to the same suicidal *cul-de-sac* but instead returns to his wife and son to honour Enders.

The most radical formal transformation that occurs separating John Woo's Hong Kong films from his Hollywood films is the use of the Mexican standoff. The Mexican standoff is the moment of extreme tension and precariousness when nerves of steel and the perception of the slightest change in the Armageddon scenario determines salvation or annihilation, with the principal characters aiming a loaded gun at the other at point blank range. The classic John Woo Mexican standoff requires at least two participants but it can include more, such as five in *Face/Off*, or two entire sets

of opposing Triad gangs as in *Hard Boiled*. In the Hong Kong films, the Mexican standoff, outside of *A Bullet in the Head* and *Once a Thief*, marked the moment of unexpected friendship between former antagonists who realise the other's *yingxiong* and *junzi* sensibilities. This friendship of crossed handguns then signals the start of their mutual co-operation and the reaffirmation of Confucianism. However, in the Hollywood films, this same formal device departs from the established Hong Kong norm. In the Hollywood manifestations of the Mexican standoff, its redemptive value is lost since the inequalities that separate the singular hero from his allies and antagonists remain rigidly in place. This separation is reinforced by an inequality of weapons and moral positions.

A proper Mexican standoff is absent in most of John Woo's Hollywood films. When it does occur, it takes on a comic dimension since the inequality of weapons disrupts the balance of potential mutual annihilation. This occurs in *Broken Arrow*. Hale faces Carmicheal with her service pistol and she with her knife. This weapon imbalance defeats the symmetry that is a staple of this *mise-en-scène* and reinforces Hale's dominant position within the pair.

More so than the inequality of arms is the rigidity of the moral dividing line that prevents the possibility of friendships and alliances. In *Windtalkers*, the Mexican standoff did not involve our Marine protagonists, but instead, the windtalker and an anonymous Japanese enlisted man during the heat of battle. Here, the purpose of the Mexican standoff is to reinforce the racial similarities between Navajo and Japanese rather than the equality of their moral and heroic valour that can then lead to an unexpected alliance. Instead, the racially charged moment gives credence to a later racist remark from a fellow white Marine who justifies his racially-based bullying of Yahzee with this racial 'fact'.

The Mexican standoff takes its most exaggerated manifestation in *Face/Off*. There are two occurrences. The lesser occurrence happens in the cathedral where the chief antagonists along with their important associates and heterosexual partners have a group bonding moment with drawn weapons. While the similarities of the opposing sides are given their respective logical credence, it doesn't eradicate the demarcation line of difference. The opposing sides remain in their corners and only the FBI will claim ultimate victory. The more classical Mexican standoff is a private one between Archer/Troy and Troy/Archer. Here, the former symbolic juxtaposition between two opposing characters has undergone technological mediation with both characters having their faces surgically transplanted onto the other. In other words, the formerly poetic juxtaposition has now become a literal event. While they have become the other, living each other's lives, and beginning to have more than a passing insight into the other's life, the possibility of friendship is impossible since the demarcation line between the opposing moral lives remains sacrosanct. One of them must die and this imperative is cemented by the real Archer's prolonged scream at Troy to, 'Die!', at the end of their drawn out fight. The restored Archer makes the

altruistic choice of inviting Troy's orphaned son into his household, but the reverse scenario is out of the question, even on a contemplative level.

In *Mission Impossible 2*, this same technological assistance in juxtaposing the two characters takes on a forced dimension. Both Hunt and Ambrose are members of the IMF team. Ambrose has used his skills in disguise to impersonate Hunt twice which effectively mimics *Face/Off* but without surgical imposition. Hunt has the same skills but never impersonates Ambrose, thus keeping the division between the two firmly in place. Hunt and Ambrose limit their interaction with each other indirectly through their shared romantic interest. The possibility of Hunt and Ambrose forming a friendship or even an alliance is never a possibility since even when they were teammates, Hunt never respected Ambrose.

In *Paycheck*, John Woo's most recent film, a meditation on friendship is eradicated in favour of a love story coupled by the pursuit of wealth. Here, American individualism is at its most extreme since it celebrates and rewards Jenning's self-centred obsession. Not only is he able to thwart the most elaborate procedures designed to erase all memory of his most recent past, a procedure he has agreed willingly to undertake as part of his reverse engineering contract, but he also connives to reward himself with a winning lottery ticket. So, in the end, without the need of any outside help from another individual, he gets Dr. Porter and the lottery winnings – boy gets girl in the end and they live happily ever after swamped in wealth. *Paycheck* is a complete departure from the Hong Kong heroic bloodshed films and represents John Woo's most Americanised film.

Conclusion

The Pacific Passage is not a one-way street. The process of acculturation for any immigrant living in a new country does not involve the complete eradication of the cultural anchors from the former country in favour of the new. While John Woo is proving himself in Hollywood by consistently directing action films that produce a hefty profit, this occurs at the expense of his *junzi* sensibilities. John Woo emerged into *auteur* status working within Hong Kong's studio system. There is no reason why he cannot repeat this within New Hollywood, an updated studio system of its own. Rather than continuing to remain interpolated by Hollywood and confined by a rigid notion of 'mainstream America', John Woo should be able to interpolate mainstream America with his own meditations on friendship from a Confucian perspective. This would in turn allow the United States to live up to its multicultural aspirations and allow Hollywood to live up to its global stature as one amongst many rather than the one and only. Ultimately, if John Woo was able to be political with his films in apolitical Hong Kong, then a greater degree of creative political filmmaking should be welcomed in a nation that protects the freedom of expression as a basic constitutional right.

3 Hong Kong film goes to America

Staci Ford

In John Woo's *A Better Tomorrow II* (1987), Ken (Chow Yun-Fat) plays the mistreated Asian immigrant coping with the arrogance of an Italian-American thug complaining about the food and extorting money from the restaurant manager. Ken gains the upper hand, however, and in a memorable scene he sermonises about the disrespect given to Asian immigrants in the United States holding a gun to the thug's head hissing, 'For you, rice is nothing, but for me, it's just like my mother and father'. In a moment of cross-racial bonding a black police officer insists that the white man eat Ken's rice before he's arrested. This Hong Kong film is one of many that hold a mirror up to 'Americans' and US society and the images the audience sees – distorted, comic, tragic, familiar, bizarre, disconcerting, or comforting – merit a closer look.

In this essay, I will consider several Hong Kong films (released during the 1980s and 1990s) looking at the ways the films engage national myths and notions of Americanism as well as considering what specific films have to say about the people, places, and culture of the United States. The essay will focus specifically on the way Hong Kong films revise traditional mythologies of the nineteenth-century 'American west' and the late twentieth-century 'immigrant in search of the American Dream' in New York City. It will also discuss how gender representations in the films comment upon and challenge gender stereotypes in several cultural contexts – Hong Kong, China, Taiwan, and the United States.

It is important to keep in mind that the films I focus on here were produced largely for an Asian regional and diasporic audience. As such, they have a different point of view than Hong Kong films that have been absorbed into the Hollywood system, and/or films made for a largely American or English-speaking global market. Presently, there are many Hong Kong filmmakers such as Jackie Chan, John Woo, Wayne Wang, Tsui Hark, Ringo Lam, Sammo Hung, Curtis Choy, Corey Yuen, Jet Li, Chow Yun-Fat, and Michelle Yeoh, who enjoy commercial success in both the United States and Hong Kong. Additionally, Hollywood's interest in acquiring scripts and distribution rights or appropriating Hong Kong filmmaking techniques in films such as *The Matrix* or *Kill Bill* has been written about in this volume

and elsewhere.[1] Here, however, the central focus is on Hong Kong-based perspectives on the United States rather than the absorption of Hong Kong talent into Hollywood, or the way the United States appears in Hollywood blockbusters utilising Hong Kong talent such as *Rush Hour I* and *II*, *Romeo Must Die*, *Bride of Chucky*, *Mission Impossible*, and *Face Off*. So, although I am interested in looking at films made by John Woo, Jackie Chan, and Tsui Hark (among others), I have selected films that telescope myths of westward expansion and immigrant adjustment.

I have chosen to touch upon two types of Hong Kong films: those that have either enjoyed substantial success in the United States/international commercial or cult market (where large audiences have been witness to the way the films address US culture and history) or films with a specific emphasis on deconstructing/reconstructing particular 'American' myths, monuments, histories, and cultural referents. Hong Kong cinematic representations of the United States reflect an insider/outsider point of view that talks back to histories, myths, and core cultural values in the United States even as they maintain important links to Hong Kong. In some ways, the films are not unlike examples of Asian American cultural production which perform (to borrow Lisa Lowe's term) 'Immigrant Acts'. These films are both familiar (and they reveal how Hong Kong people share in the historical experience of the United States) yet marked by a certain 'foreign-ness' (often imposed on rather than embraced by the 'immigrant' herself/himself). Although this foreignness is often seen as being something exotic (and can be marked as orientalist or reflecting 'yellow peril' stereotypes), it can also represent 'other modes of retrieving and spatialising history'.[2]

Hong Kong films, like the texts Lowe discusses are important because '[They] offer other modes for imagining and narrating immigrant subjectivity and community – emerging out of conditions of decolonisation, displacement, and disidentification – and refuse assimilation into dominant narratives of integration, development and identification'.[3] In this respect, Lowe reminds us that we are following Walter Benjamin's lead, seeking not to understand the past 'as it really was' but to 'brush history against the grain'.[4] Many Hong Kong films tell stories of people, narratives, traditions, histories and capital transiting between the United States and Hong Kong.

I am interested in how Hong Kong films reconfigure US history and how they both contest and reinscribe certain myths such as 'Manifest Destiny' or 'The City on a Hill' metaphor (albeit the inverse of the Puritan notion) in their dystopian representations of the United States. In this mode, films as different as Sammo Hung/Tsui Hark's *Once upon a Time in China and America* (1997), John Woo's *A Better Tomorrow II* (1987) and Jackie Chan's *Rumble in the Bronx* (1995), essentialise the United States as a wasteland of racism and violence. That they do so, and the way they do so says something about the United States as well as the filmmaker perspective and era in which the film was released. While many of the films reproduce stereotypes of Americans (and often Asians and Asian Americans) the way they do so is

informative. In addition, Hong Kong films offer provocative characterisations, unique camera angles, plots, music, or dialogue in their stories of sojourners settling in the United States. Even technical matters offer food for thought. For example, the inconsistencies between subtitles and sound address aspects of cultural connections/disconnections and offer insights into the process of transporting stories across linguistic as well as cultural borders.

Another group of films discussed in the second part of the essay tell the story of the urban underside of the quest to fulfil the American dream. These films are set in New York City and they are migration melodramas, an overlooked but richly textured body of work offering a quiet response to the well-known call of the Hong Kong *kungfu* action genre. Films such as Mabel Cheung's *An Autumn's Tale* (1987), Peter Chan's *Comrades, almost a Love Story* (1996) Stanley Kwan's *Full Moon in New York* (1990), Clara Law's *Farewell China* (1990), and Evans Chan's *Crossings* (1994) unpack and critique the rhetoric of success and upward mobility in both Hong Kong and the United States playing with stereotypes and myths in both places to introduce audiences to similarities and differences in attitudes, cultural values, individual preoccupations, and the negotiation of identities – Hong Kong, diasporic Chinese, mainland Chinese, Taiwanese, feminist, postmodern, or transnational.[5]

These Hong Kong films appropriate US spaces, mythologies, and histories with disarming ease. In many cases, they do the cultural work of remaking, and reconfiguring US history and in the process underscore the interconnectedness of Hong Kong and the United States. If, as Henry Yu notes, scholars are interested in studying American experiences in a globalised world, they 'should strive to place nation formation within transnational contexts of racial and cultural differentiation';[6] Hong Kong films are not just examples of a hybridised cultural form, they are themselves, important historical documents. As Esther Yau argues, '[Hong Kong movies] can appear provincial yet also Hollywood-like; they have become the cultural counterpart of the "cosmopolitan capitalist" undertakings that many Asians, especially ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs, have launched since the nineteenth century'.[7] Because Hong Kong films compete with Hollywood for 'Chinese audiences and for overseas markets, they are already a part of the media hegemonies, on the one hand, and they help generate other stories and memories in diverse instances of consumption, reading, and reinvention, on the other'.[8]

Hong Kong films released in the 1980s and 1990s not only tell stories about how US history is changed when seen from a Hong Kong vantage point, they reflect an increasing engagement with US culture in Hong Kong, and in the formation of Hong micro and macro identities. Chu Yingchi notes that Hong Kong cinema in the 1980s and 1990s served as 'a forum for the construction, exploration and questioning of Hong Kong's sense of nationhood'.[9] Seeing Hong Kong as a 'quasi-nation' she notes that between 'the

late 1970s and 1997, Hong Kong cinema shared many of the features of national cinema'.[10] I am aware that the definition of Hong Kong cinema is fluid, contentious and in conversation with discussions of the histories of mainland Chinese, Taiwanese, diasporic, and other cinema histories. However, I find Chu's use of the term quasi-nation helpful and it paves the way for considering how the cinema of the quasi-nation of Hong Kong chronicled and commented on changes in various other national settings including the United States. Hong Kong film critics have addressed the way the imagined community of China is invoked in Hong Kong films but work remains to be done in considering how other national identities and cultures are configured in Hong Kong films. Although I will focus on US/Hong Kong connections here, there is similar work to be done on links between Hong Kong and Great Britain, Canada, Australia, and other diasporic destinations. There is also another essay to be written about Americans visiting or living in Mainland China and Hong Kong in films like Ann Hui's *My American Grandson* (1991) or Wayne Wang's *Life is Cheap … but Toilet Paper is Expensive* (1989). The 'drive-by American' sightings in these films and others (see the representation of Hollywood producers in the 2003 film *Anna in Kungfu Land*) are often sermons in themselves.

Coupling of Hong Kong and US history

Before proceeding to a more specific discussion of how late twentieth-century Hong Kong films envision aspects of the United States, it is important to note that links between the film industries of Hong Kong and the United States predate the current interest in the Hollywood cum global success of Jackie Chan, John Woo, Chow Yun-Fat, Michelle Yeoh, and others. As Law Kar, David Desser and others have shown, cross fertilisation in cinema and Cantonese opera between Hong Kong and Hollywood filmmakers and audiences dates to the earliest years of the twentieth century. Law Kar's work illuminates the interflow of artists and films between Hollywood, Hong Kong and Shanghai from the 1920s through World War II, and David Desser argues that American audiences became interested in Hong Kong *kungfu* schools and cinema in the 1960s and 1970s through the impact of Bruce Lee and other Hong Kong artists who made frequent trips across the Pacific. In the 1970s, the popularity of the *kungfu* genre was linked to 'the US encounter with Asia through wars as well as migration'.[11] Hong Kong film reinforced and reflected Hong Kong's position as a base for R&R during the Korean and Vietnam Wars. Blockbuster films such as *The World of Suzie Wong*, *Soldier of Fortune*, and *Love is a Many-splendored Thing* were immensely popular in the United States in the Cold War period.[12] In the past two decades, a cohort of commercial and independent filmmakers such as Evans Chan, Alan Fong, Mabel Cheung, Tsui Hark, Corey Yuen, Curtis Choy, and Wayne Wang (to name but a few) engaged the Hong Kong/America connection in a range of films that built on autobiographical

experiences as graduate students in the United States (*An Autumn's Tale* is based on Mabel Cheung's experiences at NYU), or on historical events that were overlooked and ignored by Hollywood. Films such as *The Soong Sisters* and *Eat a Bowl of Tea* explore the way Hong Kong, United States, and Chinese pasts interconnect and inform domestic as well as international relations.

Ultimately, engagement throughout the twentieth century fed movement of people back and forth across the Pacific, and generated creative linkages of multiple types. The links in the domain of immigration history offer new ways to view immigration in the US context as well as in the context of more global movements of people and capital. Although European immigration has been well represented on Hollywood's screens, Asian immigration, particularly in the post-1965 era has, with a few exceptions, been sidelined in Hollywood. A rich documentary film tradition engaging previously invisible histories in such works as Tsui Hark's *Spikes and Spindles*, Felicia Lowe's *Carved in Silence*, or Renee Tajima Pena's *My America: or Honk if you Love Buddha*, fill this void to a certain extent but commercially successful films about Asian immigration to the United States (with the exception of *Joy Luck Club* and *Heaven and Earth*) are still few in number and Hollywood continues to caricature or exoticise its immigrants from Asia in films such as the recent Disney remake of *Freaky Friday*. Yet as Lisa Lowe reminds us, 'Understanding Asian immigration to the United States is fundamental to understanding the racialised foundations of both the emergence of the United States as a nation and the development of American capitalism'.[13] While the Hong Kong films I will discuss are not consciously invoking historical themes, they do 'brush history against the grain' telling stories of migration, loss, identity formation, contribution, and anxiety. They also reveal how economic change and sociopolitical shifts in both Hong Kong and the United States inscribed themselves on bodies and in communities in the United States.

Of equal importance is the fact that so many of the filmmakers and actors who have 'made it' in the United States are themselves transiting back and forth between Hong Kong and Hollywood living history as well as making films about aspects of history. As Steve Fore notes, Jackie Chan, John Woo, Chow Yun-Fat, Michelle Yeoh, and others come to the United States 'as sojourners from Hong Kong, a territory undergoing significant political and social transformation': '[As such, they] occupy a cultural space between the involuntary migrations of political and economic refugees and the voluntary cross-border travels of expatriate professionals employed by transnational corporations (and the filmmakers have more in common with the latter than the former).'[14]

In their personal histories they embody the immigrant experience even as their films narrate it

I do not wish to essentialise Hong Kong films or filmmakers. Clearly there are important differences in the way various film genres engage the United States on screen. Keeping in mind the diversity of stories, filmmakers, and genres, however, I believe there is also common ground between the films in that the United States is seen – from the perspective of the immigrants and astronauts in these films at least – as anything but a 'shining city on a hill' or home for the 'huddled masses yearning to breathe free'. Even though there are qualitative differences in the way various films characterise Americans and American culture, nearly all Hong Kong cinematic portrayals of the United States, particularly New York City, render 'the land of the free' as a place that is exceptional in its hypocrisy, racism, and violence; in its unruly (and unsupervised) children; its sexually libidinous women, and its bad food. I turn now to a brief discussion of two Hong Kong films that engage the notions of the American frontier myth or manifest destiny (the idea that it was America's unique national mission to 'conquer', 'settle', or 'civilise' the west) and notions of immigrant mobility and attainment of the 'American dream'.

'Gold Mountain' as Cold Mountain: revising the American west

Although *Rumble in the Bronx* (1994) was billed as Jackie Chan's first big hit in the United States, *Shanghai Noon* (2000) was a blockbuster that expanded and globalised Chan's star status. Technically the film is more Hollywood in some respects as it was released by Touchstone Pictures and Spyglass Entertainment in association with Jackie Chan Ltd Films. The film was directed by Tom Dey and the script was written by Alfred Gough and Miles Milar. However, I claim a Hong Kong birthright for the film because much of the story was Chan's brainchild and it was apparently based on material borrowed from Chan's earlier films *Project A* and *Project A Part II*.[15] Set in 1881 *Shanghai Noon* recounts the story of Beijing Imperial Guard Chon Wang (Jackie Chan) and his adventures in the American west with cowboy Roy O' Bannon (Owen Wilson). While it is largely an entertaining vehicle for Chan's magnetism and stunts, it joins a series of revisionist westerns such as *Unforgiven* and *The Ballad of Little Jo* in rewriting the frontier saga and 'multiculturalising' the American west.

The film interrogates cultural and gender stereotypes in a light-hearted manner and it does take certain topics quite seriously – particularly the exploitation of Chinese immigrants as railroad labourers, and the challenges such labourers faced in frontier societies. When imperial guard Chon Wang (Chan) engages in witty banter with cowboy sidekick Roy O' Bannon (Wilson) he is – albeit in a frothy way – deconstructing the myth of manifest

destiny, showing how the frontier was a multiethnic site of contact, and lampooning western ignorance of 'the Chinese' and Chinese culture circulating in frontier societies in the United States *Shanghai Noon* plays with stereotypes of masculinity, features women as rescuers rather than in need of rescuing, and subverts the 'subaltern sidekick' stereotype by making Roy O'Bannon Chon Wang's 'Tonto'. The film begins in Beijing juxtaposing a highly developed Chinese civilisation (represented by the presentation of the Imperial Guards in the Forbidden City) against a violent xenophobic American west. Chan's cheeky appropriation of the identity of western film icon John Wayne stakes a claim that fuses Chinese and American languages, histories, and cultural signifiers. While the film does not purport to teach revisionist history, it enters a US context more attuned to the problematic representations of the American west in history and earlier Hollywood films. But *Shanghai Noon* is a latecomer to the game of revising the myth of the American west via Hong Kong film. There is a long tradition of the phenomenon.

Once upon a Time in China and America (1997), a *kungfu* film shot entirely in Texas, is, like *Shanghai Noon*, revisionist western history. The film is part of a series of films reprising the story of Huang/Wong Feihong (1847–1924), a martial arts master and practitioner of traditional Chinese medicine who was from the Guangdong province of China, near Hong Kong. His story has been told in several 1950s films and a 1970s television series, and was reprised by Tsui Hark (with Jet Li playing Wong in several of the films) during the 1990s.[16] The first films in the Tsui series, *Once upon a Time in China* (I and II) are seen as nationalistic tales recounting western imperialism in China. Stephen Teo argues that the nationalist sentiment in his films can be traced to Tsui's own Hong Kong/US connection:

> Born in Vietnam in 1951, Tsui came to Hong Kong in 1966 at the age of fifteen. He was educated in Hong Kong and then went on to further his studies in the United States. The experience of growing up as a Sino-Vietnamese teenager in the territory must have been formative. One can detect in Tsui's films a certain sensitivity to the fact that he is an overseas Chinese; they seem to tell everyone who cares to listen that his films are very Chinese indeed, referring as they do to Chinese history and culture, a Chinese environment. The role of Tsui's nationalism, therefore, is mainly to signify his 'Chineseness'.[17]

The films have been criticised for reproducing both xenophobic and orientalist stereotypes, although some critics suggest Tsui's characters are merely abstractions of the stereotypes Hollywood has employed of Asians in films over the past several decades.

However, *Once upon a Time in China and America* (produced by Tsui and directed by Sammo Hung) does go beyond *Shanghai Noon* in exploring the plight of Chinese workers on the frontier and invoking a certain amount of

historical reality in narrating the way Chinese American communities were formed and how they functioned in the face of prejudice.[18] Yet, as Teo notes, *Once upon a Time in China and America* actually bolsters American exceptionalist notions of the west. It does this by celebrating:

> official recognition of America's first Chinatown, an erasure of the fact that the United States Congress passed racist legislation excluding Chinese from entering the country in 1882, kept such laws on the books until 1943, and prohibited Chinese from becoming eligible for naturalisation until 1952 … [The populist finale also contributes to 'historical amnesia' by presenting a classless democracy …][19]

This interpretation of the film reveals that American exceptionalism can be reinscribed from various perspectives inside and outside of the United States. Teo reminds us that the film is not just a harmless romp as it 'fails to draw out the implications of the two peoples' marginalised histories' because of its caricatures of Native Americans.[20] Both films reveal that in a globalised film industry, where Hollywood influence and United States audiences are courted, national ideologies (in this case American and Chinese nationalisms) and stereotypes will survive, mutate, and be revitalised by filmmakers more concerned about market share than making invisible histories visible. Directors are not trained historians but their cinematic visions have a reach and a staying power beyond that of most written and oral history texts.

New York stories: migration melodramas and the American Dream

Another more contemporary rendering of marginalised histories appears in the Hong films about immigration to the United States in the final decades of the twentieth century. Many scholars and critics have noted that in the 1980s and 1990s Hong Kong cinema assisted in the construction of Hong Kong's quasi-national identity through narratives of the Chinese diaspora building new lives and creating new identities in the west. Thousands of Hong Kong people applied to immigrate to the United States, Canada, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand in the period following the Sino-British Joint Declaration of 1984 and again after the events occurring in Tiananmen Square in 1989. As Chu Yingchi notes, because a real departure from Hong Kong was not an option available to most of its residents, after the mid-1980s: 'it became almost a fashion for local filmmakers to create some sort of narrative connection with overseas, offering a fantasy for local spectators to vicariously experience life in the West'.[21] In the United States during the 1980s and 1990s, 'astronauts' from Hong Kong belonged to a wave of 'new immigration' (as opposed to earlier waves of immigrants mostly from Europe) that began with changes in US immigration law in 1965. Hong

Kongers arrived at a time when the United States was coping with demographic changes in the general population as well as with economic and sociopolitical upheavals related to developments on both the domestic and global fronts.

Hong Kong *kungfu* and action films captured the dissonance felt by men caught up in the dislocating limbo of living between two worlds. I have already mentioned the example of Ken in *A Better Tomorrow II* but there are other examples as well. In *Rumble in the Bronx* (1995), good Samaritan Keung (Jackie Chan) has come to New York City to work in his cousin's Bronx supermarket while he takes a honeymoon with his new wife. In scene after scene, Chan is mocked, assaulted, and forced to police a society where the police seem unable or willing to do their job. Even as he triumphs over the bad guys with stunts and *kungfu* manoeuvres, the violence and carnage surrounding his multiple encounters with Americans and their daily routines is a morality tale of how 'Asian values' must school democracy run amok.

Migration melodramas, unlike the John Woo and Jackie Chan films, receive much less attention from mainstream US audiences, but they do have a following among the Chinese diaspora and Hong Kong film fans who are willing to broaden their tastes beyond the martial arts genre. Like *Rumble in the Bronx* and *A Better Tomorrow II*, these migration stories are set in New York City but they offer a nuanced look at issues facing immigrants generally as well as telescoping the highly individual experiences of the Hong Kong diaspora. In contradistinction to the action films, these films place women's lives and relationships at the centre of the narrative. New York City becomes a mirror of Hong Kong, a place where many Hong Kong people (including many of the directors and actors in these films) found an environment that replicated (to a certain extent) the port city they left behind. I will briefly discuss shared themes and insights about New York, American culture, and the way American mythologies are viewed, contested, appropriated, or revised in *Full Moon in New York* (1990), *Farewell China* (1990), *Comrades: Almost a Love Story* (1996), *An Autumn's Tale* (1987), and *Crossings* (1994).

Most of these films 'talk back' to Hollywood representations that glamorise the urban spaces of New York City as portrayed in the films of Nora Ephron, Woody Allen and in the HBO TV serial *Sex and the City*. Chu Yingchi captures the feel of all of these films (although she is writing about *Full Moon in New York*) when she writes:

> In the absence of images of the Statue of Liberty and Christmas decorations, New York is represented as a cold, impersonal, lifeless and colourless city, a concrete jungle. The sky is foggy. Buildings stand side by side in the misty, hazy air. Canyons between buildings viewed from a low camera angle convey a feeling of oppression and depressing lifestyle. The three dominant colours in the film: grey, dark blue and white, present a gloomy and sombre place. In the film, New York people are

> just crowds, faceless and sombre. Their dress is formal and their manner defensive. With background noise of busy traffic, police and ambulance sirens, and images of Hong Kong migrant Li Fengjiao being assaulted in the street, the city appears threatening. There are three major images of local people in the film, each presenting a negative impression of the city – crime, poverty and Anglo-Saxon domination.[22]

All of the films feature poignant moments of bonding with and alienation from US culture and the films often parallel or reflect the director's life experiences. For example, Mabel Cheung's *An Autumn's Tale* is about a young woman attending graduate school in New York City. Cheung completed her Master's degree at New York University.

An Autumn's Tale is more upbeat in its plot and representations of certain New York neighbourhoods and landmarks, but in general the city is portrayed as anything but welcoming to the Hong Kong transplant. The film offers a textured analysis of how it feels to be new in the urban wasteland of Manhattan and its less privileged boroughs. It explores generational difference among immigrants as well as class and educational differences between new immigrants and Asian Americans who have left the city and moved to the suburbs. In a scene near the beginning of the film, we see how Hong Kong women are often compared to American women by Hong Kong men who use gender stereotypes to suit their purposes at different times. In a performance that both mirrors and eschews his representation of Ken in *A Better Tomorrow II*, Chow Yun-Fat is the gentle but worldly 'Figgy' who provides a spoiled and bewildered Jennifer (Cherie Chung) with a cultural translator and a protector in the dangerous new world she inhabits.

Peter Chan's *Comrades: Almost a Love Story* plays on the tourist's familiarity with New York City's Times Square to highlight the alienation felt by Guangzhou/Hong Kong sojourner Li Chiao (Maggie Cheung). As Li is being driven to the airport to be deported back to Hong Kong she is surrounded by burger-eating, racist Americans, insensitive and arrogant bureaucrats who assume that she is looking for 'a free ride' in the United States. Li Xiao-Jun (Leon Lai) is also in the same neighbourhood riding through the congested street on his bicycle. Li Chiao (Cheung) bolts from the car when she sees him. Gender is in play as the Caucasian female immigration official can't run after Li Chiao with her male colleagues because she is in high heels. When she trips, one of her male colleagues is torn between staying to help her or capturing Li. The white woman motions him onwards to pursue Li, clearly frustrated that the fugitive is escaping. As the camera widens to show the pursuit fail, Times Square is once again represented as a familiar space. Hassidic Jews stroll past tourists in line to buy discount Broadway show tickets. Director Peter Chan ends the scene with Li Chao standing at the base of the monument to 'Yankee Doodle Dandy' George M. Cohen striking a pose resembling that of the famous patriot captured in bronze. The camera angle widens to place Li (and Cohen) in context. They are

sharing this city space with a large billboard of three men of obviously different ethnic identities cajoling 'Come eat with us!' The audience is reminded that the smile and invitation to 'eat with Americans' is, in fact, masking alienation.

In addition to observing how American cities and people are portrayed in these films, selected aspects of American mythologies and popular culture are represented or played with in the films. Noting the invocation of 'the American Dream' as a motif for Mainlanders coming to Hong Kong as well as to the United States, Marchetti asserts that consumption and upward mobility often become stand ins for each other in the films. However, as she warns us, consumption of goods does not equate with acceptance inside of the United States. For the mainlanders in *Comrades*, as she notes, 'the promise of prosperity in Hong Kong and New York is undercut by the harsh conditions for immigrants in both places'.[23]

Women and gender in the Hong Kong migration melodrama

As previously noted, all of the films feature women as the central or one of the central characters in the story and are an important counterbalance in an industry (in both Hong Kong and Hollywood) that has focused inordinately on men's experiences and masculine identities. From a historical standpoint, the migration melodrama is the reverse of the 'bachelor society' immigration motif of Chinese immigration in the nineteenth century. Both women and men make these films. Mabel Cheung directed *An Autumn's Tale* and Clara Law directed *Farewell China* but male directors Stanley Kwan (*Full Moon in New York*), Peter Chan (*Comrades: Almost a Love Story*), and Evans Chan (*Crossings*) place women's stories at the centre of their New York migration sagas and in so doing give voice to the invisible histories of women in diaspora. Noting the linkage between history, feminism, and postmodernity in *Full Moon in New York* it has been argued that director Stanley Kwan provides an example of how directors of this film genre see 'women as intrinsic to the development of new postmodern modes of speaking and writing'.[24]

These films also point to the way gender, ethnicity, and class are intertwined in the migration saga. It is women who are leaving husbands behind in China (*Farewell China*), women who support themselves or families in the United States (*Crossings*, *Full Moon Over New York*, *An Autumn's Tale*), women who are left to survive after lovers or husbands are murdered (*Comrades: Almost a Love Story*, *Farewell China*) and women who craft new identities in the United States even as they negotiate with their anxieties and the gendered expectations of Hong Kong and the United States. While many films made in this period have been seen as marking the uncertainty and loss of Hong Kong's return to China in 1997, there is more at work. As Gina Marchetti notes, 'Women experience a different type of "crossing" than men. Traditional roles for women dissolve in the diaspora. Families

become unhinged, scattered; romantic relationships become more fleeting'.[25] While Marchetti is speaking specifically about *Crossings*, her assertion applies to all of the films considered here and to many of the migration melodramas made by Hong Kong filmmakers. The films invoke universal themes about migratory history and change. As Marchetti reminds us,

> Cast adrift by a desire to escape from rigid families, ex-husbands, and the feeling of being alienated from the traditional world in which they were born and bred, these women move off with a different sense of loss, different fears, and for reasons that go far beyond the political dynamics of 1997.[26]

In *Farewell China* a distraught husband comes to terms with the way gender and violence have inflected his wife's life when he is asked: 'Do you understand what it's like to be a woman all by herself in New York? Do you understand the desperation when there is menstruation and no money for sanitary napkins? Do you understand what it feels like to be raped?'[27] These films add to a transnational feminist conversation about differences between and among women and offer ways to think about how migration is gendered and how the United States relies on the labour of marginalised women from Asia within its own borders as well as elsewhere.

Diasporic identities in context

Many Hong Kong film scholars have noted the way these films speak to differences between various groups in diaspora. This is particularly important because for many Americans, despite the rise in numbers of immigrants from Asia, and a greater awareness of cultural difference among various groups linked with a pan-Chinese diaspora, there is still widespread ignorance about what unites and divides various groups. (This fact is lampooned in many places in the films but the most memorable is at the beginning of *An Autumn's Tale* when Chow Yun-Fat's character Figgy pretends to speak Japanese in order to keep from being ticketed by a New York City traffic cop.) In some respects, then, these films become important texts for educating the US population about differences between various people of Asian descent. The films utilise humour, reverse stereotype, or off-handed images and remarks to lampoon an American population still quite unfamiliar with various national modes of Chinese-ness even as the numbers of people of Chinese descent in within the United States increases, and as diverse economic and political relationships with Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the People's Republic of China continue to make news on a daily basis.

Full Moon in New York offers a glimpse into three individual women's stories and three different diasporic experiences, Hong Kong, mainland China, and Taiwan with each woman adjusting to life in New York in ways that reflect not just individual but national/quasi-national identities.[28]

Characters in the film try to survive by adjusting to the 'chi [*qi*] of New York City' without losing their identities or sanity. The film offers a way to think about difference in diasporic identities and experiences, but is particularly critical of (as are most of the Hong Kong films I've studied) American Born Chinese characters – particularly men – who are essentialised as lacking something – in this case a 'real' sense of historical identity. As Chu Yingchi notes, Thomas, a Chinese American Chinese husband married to a Mainland woman, does not understand his wife's wish to bring her mother to New York because he lacks a deep understanding of how history has wounded both mother and daughter. (As movie critic Paul Fonoroff notes, this is particularly incongruous because Thomas actually speaks fluent Mandarin.[29]) Another critique of American men generally is, as Chu observes, present in the subplot between Huang (Taiwanese actress Sylvia Chang) and the men in her New York City existence. Chu notes, '[W]ith her American boyfriend, Huang's conversation is about who owns what (earrings and a few books). With the Taiwanese man, her conversation revolves around family members, their past in Taiwan, their present in New York, and their passion for Chinese culture'.[30]

A distinct impression left by several of these films is that the immigrant existence in New York brings with it the danger of mental instability or psychosis. *Full Moon in New York*, *Comrades*, and *An Autumn's Tale* are more hopeful narratives than *Farewell China* and *Crossings*. Audrey Yue has written about *Farewell China* as a psychodrama not only showing the dark side of New York but exposing how national crisis in both the United States and China take a toll on children of the diaspora. Yue sees the film as portraying 'the unspoken reality of mental illness which afflicts many Chinese students struggling overseas'.[31]

Conclusion

I have offered a few ideas about how to read Hong Kong films as they connect with US history, culture, and identity. Flipping the script on Hollywood paves the way for a consideration of how the United States (and its people and culture) appear from the perspective of other national and quasi-national cinemas. Hong Kong films exercise a form of 'soft power', to use Joseph Nye's term, in their ability to cajole movie-going Americans into taking a look at themselves in a different light. As these films address American people, places, modes of exceptionalism, culture, and history, they offer important albeit often marginalised perspectives that merit closer and more sustained consideration.

4 Hong Kong television in Chinatown

Translocal context(s) and transnational social formations

Amy Lee

Chinatown and racialisation

Chinatown has long been a complex and prototypical site for the study of Asian American racialisation in Asian American Studies. In literary and cultural studies, the racialised character of Chinatown manifests itself most poignantly in representations of Chinatown as Orientalist spectacles,[1] and in the form of stereotypical images of the Chinese, as figures of the mysterious and unknown. In her study on Vancouver's Chinatown, Kay Anderson argues quite forcefully that Chinatown is a discursive construction, an idea of place that is coterminous with ideas of race. The idea of Chinatown, like ideas of race, relies on representations, cultural assumptions and institutions (as well as the complicity of the community) that give these ideas legitimacy. Moreover, these ideas are for the most part a 'European creation':[2] 'Chinatown is a social construction with a cultural history and a tradition of imagery and institutional practice that has given it a cognitive and material reality in and for the West.'[3] White Europeans used Chinatown to produce, reproduce and manage popular notions of the Chinese. And because racialisation (the making of racial categories) and place formation are mutually constitutive and enforcing acts, 'Chinese' and 'Chinatown' became interchangeable terms in the popular imaginary.

Of particular interest to scholars is to explain the reasons for and stakes in the production of these racialised images. Lisa Lowe offers a compelling explication of the project of Asian American racialisation. She argues that Asian American racialisation allows the US to work through the contradictions between its desire for a homogenous and abstract citizenry and its needs for cheap, exploitable labour. The racialisation of the Chinese, along with other groups, serves as the basis for the consolidation of US national culture through the apparatus of exclusion. At the same time, racialisation allows for the maximisation of capitalist accumulation through the exploitation of racialised labour. Hence, 'Asian immigrants and Asian Americans have been neither "abstract labour" nor "abstract citizens," but have been historically formed in contradiction to both the economic and the political

spheres'.[4] By extension, Chinatown, as a racialised spatial category, can be posited in contradiction to the US national and economic spheres through its abjection from national space and as the location where exploited labour takes place. Studies on racialisation, in effect, define Chinatown primarily in relation to the national sphere in which it is located and to the Western imaginary.

More and more, recent studies on Chinatown situate it in relation to transnational processes and global structures. In Jan Lin's study on New York's Chinatown, he observes how the informal sector (i.e. vending) and advanced transnational sector (i.e. banking) sit in 'direct juxtaposition'.[5] This has led Laguerre to call Chinatown an 'informal capital city', a centre built on informal institutions, linked to satellite clusters, 'reinforced by its global relations' and the institutions and global relations of the formal city (i.e. New York, San Francisco).[6] In Asia, a number of factors such as the accumulation of trade surpluses, political uncertainty and favourable trading provisions have caused many investors to divert their investments to the US.[7] Because most of the overseas Chinese investments follow Chinese settlements in the US, many of these investments are funnelled through Chinatowns.[8] Many cities in the US, like New York City, also actively woo these overseas investors in order to finance urban development projects. As a result, the influx of foreign investment from Asia has played a significant role in redeveloping Chinatown and at the same time exacerbating its class contradictions.[9] In these studies, the issue of racialisation is no longer the primary concern in understanding constructions of Chinatown.

In light of these recent discussions on Chinatown and its imbrication in global capitalist structures, how might we understand the ways in which the racial character of this spatial category has not been elided but re-constituted? This is an important question given the 'denationalising' trends in recent formulations of Asian American Studies.[10] Denationalisation has paved the way for us to conceptualise Chinatown's horizontal relationship with a wider Chinese diaspora and Asia, specifically Hong Kong,[11] thus revising long-standing understandings of Chinatown as situated primarily in a hierarchical relationship with the US nation-state. Ensuing these globalising trends is a seeming diffusion of the centrality of race in the constitution of Chinatown. For instance, Aihwa Ong and Donald Nonini understand race, or rather cultural identity, as a strategic tool that can be manipulated by *racialised subjects* in the interests of capitalist accumulation. They describe Chinese cultural identity as a *flexible* relation 'of persons and groups to forces and processes associated with global capitalism and its modernities'.[12] Trans-national Chinese publics develop flexible strategies of accumulating capital by colluding with state structures at times and transgressing them at others.[13] In a similar vein, Kwai-Cheung Lo argues that in contemporary Hong Kong diasporic cinema, the diaspora is no longer based on 'a hierarchical relationship between the Chinese cultural core and the peripheral status of

the dispersed Chinese communities' (Lo calls this the 'Middle Kingdom complex'), or for that matter on any essentialist notion of 'Chineseness'. These films aim instead to transnationalise the local, in other words to 'remake or dislocate a given space' in order to better facilitate cultural and economic flows. Hence, he observes: 'the local stands for the transnational Chinese'.[14] For example, in Hong Kong films, Chinatown is a popular shooting location for films about migration and the Chinese diaspora but other than serving as a disengaged backdrop, Chinatown receives little in-depth exploration.[15] Rather, it seems that by de-localising Hong Kong, it is possible to replicate it everywhere. At the same time, other diasporic spaces such as Chinatown are made porous for transnational flows. I am interested in how racialisation, which appears to be placed under erasure in a global world more interested in economic and cultural flows than race or ethnicity,[16] take place. Just like diasporic forms, racial forms also change according to cultural and capitalist needs, which are more and more informed by the transnational. The goal of this essay is to elucidate an understanding of racial formation in Chinatown, as it intersects with gender and class formations, that takes into consideration the relationship between transnationalising forces and the persistent claims of US racism, which far from being alleviated are further exacerbated by transnational processes. The transnational processes I am interested in exploring are those associated with diasporic movements, colonialism and late capital.

Chinatown serves as a buffer zone, enabling the entry of much-needed capital while containing its excesses through its abjection from the nation-state. Likewise, Asia is able to prevent its own excesses from undoing its capitalist success story by channelling them through Chinatown both formally and informally (i.e. as in the case of money laundering). Whereas Asia alleges cultural proximity to Chinatown, the US alleges cultural distance; these dual processes in Chinatown expose the collusion of Asian and American capitalist interests. Peter Kwong specifically explores the relationship between Hong Kong and Chinatown in his article, 'New York is Not Chinatown', in which he argues that the influx of Hong Kong migrants, capital and industrial know-how to the US and the concomitant economic boom in New York City's Chinatown paved the way for Chinatown to develop into a replica of Hong Kong. However, capitalist speculation, US Dickensian business practices and racism created instead a backwards ethnic ghetto, thus eliminating all possibilities for modernisation.[17] Hong Kong, therefore, may be culturally similar but in the end, proves superior, thus rationalising its speculative actions in Chinatown. The figure of Chinatown as backwards and ghettoised is effected through Chinatown's disjunctive relationship with Asia and America, a figuration that alleviates as much as it threatens to expose the contradictions of US and Asian capital.

Hong Kong television and the mediation of transnational racial formations

This essay explores the transnational racial, class and gender formations constituting Chinatown with particular reference to its relationship with Hong Kong, as mediated through the circulation of Hong Kong television serials. While political, economic and social structures all play a crucial role in racialising Chinatown, the racial character of Chinatown comes through most forcefully in cultural representation, probably because culture plays the most important role in producing and reproducing our ideas of Chinatown. It is for this reason that I choose a cultural site, i.e. television, as the object of my study. Yet, exploring the racial character of Chinatown simply through representations of Chinatown says little about the transnational nature of racial formations. This is because representations of Chinatown, for the most part, do not address the complexity of its transnational relationships. The task at hand is to find a new way of thinking about Chinatown – not as a stable define-able object, which then appears in representation – as a location that is, in Appadurai's terms, 'primarily relational and contextual rather than as scalar or spatial'.[18] How does this concept of locality relate to the 'actual' and 'reproducible' forms of locality such as the 'neighbourhood'?[19] Neighbourhoods, according to Appadurai, emerge out of specific historical circumstances, out of certain contexts.[20] Yet, in a world where different contexts and localities inform people's allegiances, the neighbourhood risks the dangers of 'corrosion'.[21] In other words, our sense of locality as being in a neighbourhood has been complicated by a sense of locality that crosses multiple sites. Furthermore, what is distinctive about our changing sense of locality in today's world is the impact of 'mass mediated discourses and practices'.[22] Our sense of locality in Chinatown is one that has been eroded and mediated by mass media, i.e. the global circulation of Hong Kong television serials. Might this cultural imaginary constituted by transnational media relations say something about race in a transnational framework that Chinatown as a representative object does not?

Such an inquiry would require that we consider the ways in which circulation (i.e. the circulation of Hong Kong TV) is in itself a 'cultural phenomenon'.[23] The circulation and consumption of mass media in Chinatown may constitute meanings in ways that differ from those that have been produced within Asian American culture traditionally. If, as Lee and LiPuma posit, 'the (post)modern transformation of social imaginaries is being accompanied by the emergence of inter-translatable transnational forms',[24] then we need to examine how these forms translate in and transform the Chinatown social imaginary.[25] Of course, this is not to say that representations do not matter; in fact, this essay is for the most part an analysis of TV representations, but that context(s) (i.e. the manner of circulation) delimit and inform the ways in which we read these representations. Hong Kong

TV's *circulation* to US Chinatowns provides a context for analyzing these televisual representations as constitutive of Chinese American subjectivities and for asking how these representations *speak to* Chinatown, a relationship that cannot be founded in representation alone. Although Hong Kong TV may be an alternative site of culture (i.e. alternative to the US), whether or not it functions as a *counterculture* in a subversive way is an open question. After all, global mass media has often been associated with hegemonising and homogenising strategies. Perhaps we should think of TV as a site for witnessing and elucidating different cultures of modernity, giving rise to what Grewal and Kaplan call 'scattered hegemonies'.[26]

In recent Hong Kong diasporic films,[27] the transnationalised space of Hong Kong is easily mapped onto the space of Chinatown like a spatial palimpsest, which invites us to consider how each of these spaces are constructed through the other. Though Hong Kong TV representations do not re-create this spatial palimpsest, I argue that they nonetheless perform an allegorical function that mediates the relationship between Hong Kong and Chinatown, similar to the work of the palimpsest. My understanding of allegory is borrowed from Lisa Lowe, who argues: '[T]he concept of allegory presumes that social and historical processes are not transparent, taking place through what Benjamin calls "correspondences" rather than through figures that represent or reflect a given totality.'[28] By employing the use of allegory, I understand the relationship between Hong Kong and Chinatown as one that is not based on analogy or resemblance but on 'displaced, mediated connections'.[29] The figurations of colonialism, postcoloniality, globalism and modernity within Hong Kong TV do not *reflect* the processes of racialisation and globalisation in Chinatown per se, but in pointing out their contradictions and excesses, I show how they illuminate a *different* sense of globalism and racialisation in Chinatown from the stereotypical one. Furthermore, the circulation of HK TV elucidates the *disjunctures* between Asian identity and Asian American identity, postcolonial and multicultural discourses, Asian modernity and American capitalism and melodramatic excess and working class politics. What is *not shown* in the figures of American and Asian American representations of Chinatown may in a paradoxical way show up in the figures of Hong Kong television. My concern in this essay, therefore, is not in how Chinatown is represented on Hong Kong TV but how its absence from the text directs us to other ways it may be *figured*, through abstract social relations in a globalising economy, into the televisual text.[30] Far from seeing Chinatown as an isolated ghetto, this essay attempts to situate it in a global network, vis-à-vis Hong Kong and its television culture.

In this essay, I analyse the treatment of domesticity and its excesses in a popular Hong Kong TV serial, *Looking Back in Anger* (義不容情, TVB, 1987).[31] I argue that its representation of domesticity and its excesses allegorises and critiques the racialised and gendered logic of modernity. Most importantly, I consider the ways in which Chinatown is implicated in

the complex race, class and gender relations that layer this narrative. By exploring the nature of the Hong Kong – Chinatown relationship produced through the circulation of this TV text, this essay seeks to contribute to our understandings of race, gender and class in a transnational framework.

Looking Back in Anger tells the story of two brothers over a period of 30 to 40 years. The narrative begins with the execution of their mother for a murder she did not commit. They are both adopted into a family of orphans, who are all raised by a surrogate mother, Wan Yi. The bulk of the narrative takes place in the 1980s amidst talks of Hong Kong's return to China. While Hong aims to become rich and powerful by all means necessary, including murder, his older brother Geen is much more concerned with keeping his promise to this mother to take care of the family. For Geen, being a good son, brother and friend is far more important than acquiring social status or material wealth.

Colonial inequalities and the birth of the Hong Kong family empire

Looking Back in Anger begins by foregrounding the gendered nature and class biases of the colonial government, as embodied in its legal system. The year is 1961 and Geen's mother, married to a hopeless and penniless husband, steals a wallet in a fit of desperation. It turns out the wallet was originally stolen from a man who had been murdered. She is caught by the police but instead of charging her with theft, they charge her with the murder she did not commit based on faulty evidence and presumptions. The key witness in the case, himself facing rape charges, never saw the actual crime but lies in order to convict the woman. In exchange, he wants the court to lift the rape charges against him. The court, obviously more interested in prosecuting a murder case than a rape case, complies. The colonial court system, therefore, actively reproduces gender norms and practices that make it easy to both criminalise women and belittle the crimes against them.

While inequalities are staged in the courtroom, colonial institutions nonetheless offer sites where these inequalities are actively contested, such as universities. The prosecutor repeats Geen's mother's case in a university lecture at Hong Kong University (Hong Kong's oldest tertiary institution) many years later, which Geen happens to overhear. He challenges him, asserting his mother's innocence. He tells the lecturer that they were hiding at home at the time of the murder because they did not have any red envelopes to give out on Chinese New Year. The lecturer laughs and calls the excuse preposterous; he claims that anyone, no matter how poor, could surely afford to pack some red envelopes. Geen responds, 'When you're poor, you're poor. You have nothing'. Geen intervenes at this very important site of knowledge production in colonial history and reverses the erasure of class and gender politics that made it possible to wrongfully execute a poor Chinese woman. Though colonial structures, as exemplified by the

legal system and university, produce inequalities through difference, their presumed 'democratic' practices also provide a site that encourages contestation. This dramatisation of contention, in turn, accentuates colonialism's reliance on patriarchy, capitalism and racism and their material consequences. Yet, in the end, Geen's intervention has no actual material consequences. Geen resorts to his family as a site where he can make change by loyally providing support and improving their circumstances. Even Hong, whose dream is to become a lawyer, gives up for fear that the handover would overturn the Commonwealth legal system, dashing his hopes of ever practicing. He turns to the market instead, determined to come out successful and rich. The dual structures of the family and the market, in short, eclipse the significance of the colonial regime in the Hong Kong imaginary.

If the colonial administration forms the central structures of dominance in Hong Kong in the 1960s, it is quickly superseded by the family empire, built on family-run corporations, in the 1980s. The family empire is typically run by the patriarch of the family, who is also the CEO of his family's corporation which wields its power through capitalist accumulation. In fact, the family empires stand in for the colonial structures, and the predominance of their patriarchal rule over the household and the corporation eclipses the signs of British colonialism. On the surface level, their rule is of a more innocuous kind, one that relies on familial love and loyalty. When one of the family corporations in *Looking Back in Anger*, Ngai Si, is in danger of getting bought out by a rival corporation, the CEO breaks down in tears over the prospect of losing a business built up by four generations of his family. He sees the corporation as an object of affection to be absorbed into the family structure. Running the corporation becomes naturalised as familial duty and rite of passage for men. The corporate fantasy merges with the patriarchal family romance, which together supersedes colonial narratives of self and 'other'.

It is not surprising that the family-corporate drama would be such a popular TV genre given that the colonial government's strategy of economic development and governance had aimed to promote laissez-faire economic policies, while at the same time avoiding the creation of mechanisms for civic and political participation and the provision of social services. This resulted in a society structured around familialism and individualism.[32] According to Eliza Lee, the ideology of utilitarian familialism and economic individualism fostered 'an instrumental view toward society and the state: society and the state exist merely to advance the material interest of individuals and their family members' and the belief that 'their life chances are largely determined by their individual efforts'.[33] It is for these reasons that the familial and the corporate would come to represent both the private and public/political lives of Hong Kong people on Hong Kong TV dramas, while thwarting any possibility for national consciousness.[34]

Allegories of modernity

Looking Back in Anger allegorises for Chinatown viewers the experiences of racial discrimination, and class and gender inequalities under British rule. Yet, this narrative is quickly superseded by the birth of the Hong Kong family empire, which offers the fantasy of overcoming the inequalities perpetuated by the colonialism through the promises of unrivalled capitalist opportunities made possible only by eclipsing the role of the colonial government and replacing it with the family and its sense of economic individualism. Since state apparatuses have taken quite a visible role in Chinatown's sense of oppression, this is a fantasy certainly worth having.[35] In a way, this fantasy mirrors the Model Minority myth that defines Asian American racialisation; that is, Asian Americans unlike other racialised minorities have been able to overcome inequalities and become 'successful Americans'. Chinatown has in its own way taken up the ideologies of familialism, ethnic solidarity and economic individualism in order to overcome the obstacles set up by the US nation-state. Both the Model Minority Myth and the myth of the Hong Kong family empire occlude the role of the state. Yet, as *Looking Back in Anger* illustrates, capitalist success achieved through ethnic solidarity and familialism is dependent on the reproduction of social inequalities. Primarily a working class community, Chinatown sees in the family empire the faces of their own oppressors. Chinatown is by no means a unified community; some of the worst injustices that people in Chinatown face are suffered at the hands of their co-ethnic employers and landlords. In this sense, the circulation of Hong Kong TV drama serials, far from forging a unified diasporic imaginary, works instead to highlight the contradictions of uneven global relations that underwrite diasporic visions, capitalist modernity and their intersections with state discourses. Hence, the fantasy of individualism and familialism does not offer a viable alternative to racism; it is merely symptomatic of the racist nature of the state.

Though full of contradictions, *Looking Back in Anger* does attempt to develop a shared diasporic imaginary and identity through its treatment of history. Perhaps it is no accident that *Looking Back in Anger* begins its narrative with the early history of Hong Kong, usually from the 1960s onwards, given the fact that many Chinatown residents started migrating from Hong Kong in the late 1960s after the passing of the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act. This historical narrative not only interpellates Hong Kong subjects into a televisual version of history but through its global reach also interpellates Chinatown subjects, many of whom have migrated from Hong Kong and can therefore make claims on Hong Kong history. History is important in Hong Kong TV narratives not only because it helps to solidify a sense of Hong Kong identity but also in order to ensure the popularity of these serials overseas, by drawing in audiences that share this sense of history. In short, the globalisation of Hong Kong popular media promises the development of a Hong Kong diasporic identity, one based in the representation of popular history.

The narrative trajectory of *Looking Back in Anger* is for the most part an account of a family's progression from rags to riches. By virtue of the narrative's investment in the notion of 'starting from scratch', it ensures a wide audience across a Chinese diaspora familiar with experiences of displacement and relocation. It appeals to Chinese immigrants in US Chinatowns not necessarily because it helps to forge a discursive identification with a prior homeland but because narratives of immigration, building a home and Asian modernity lend themselves easily to transnationalisation.[36] How Chinatown understands its relationship to building a home in the United States is largely informed through its encounter with fantasies of modernisation brought there through Hong Kong TV. In other words, Hong Kong TV narratives are not necessarily rooted in a diasporic culture, which invokes Chinatown viewers to articulate a relationship with Chineseness as an essentialist identity but are instead rooted in a form of immigrant culture, which by transnationalising the local through the trope of immigration and assimilation, produces an image of migration and settlement thoroughly mediated by global changes brought on by Asian modernity.

By forging a sense of intimacy between viewers and the grandiose families of TV melodramas, TV also forges a sense of intimacy between viewers and the histories that interpenetrate the familial. The family feud in *Looking Back in Anger* is intricately embedded in colonial politics (a legal injustice that one lawyer helps to perpetuate is remembered and invoked by the family of the victim years later), thus illuminating the ways in which colonial modernity has through and through intervened in traditional forms of intimacy. As the case of *Looking Back in Anger* reveals, sites of intimacy very often mediate what we understand to be diasporic, political, economic and historical.

There is another sense of the historical that I want to invoke here – though a tentative formulation at the moment – that surfaces from the nature of TV's circulation. For the Chinatown that took part in Hong Kong history but never became Hong Kong, Hong Kong popular culture is also perhaps a signifier of its lack of modernisation and its time-lag vis-à-vis Hong Kong. Indeed, what is popular in Chinatown is almost always guaranteed by its popularity in Hong Kong, a trace of Chinatown's enduring relationship with Hong Kong rather than an independent cultural phenomenon. In other words, Chinatown is always on the receiving end of Hong Kong culture. The popular becomes a marker of temporal (and I would also say class) difference and it is this difference along with the lack of Chinatown representations on TV dramas that signifies the historical processes of uneven development in modernity and solidifies Chinatown's alterity to US and Asian modernities.[37]

The crisis of capital: contradictions of class, race and gender

Although the family romance obscures the significance of colonialism in Hong Kong in the 1980s, the impending crisis of 1997 unleashes middle-class

anxieties about the end of capitalism and family empires. Hong, like many others, tries to profit from the Sino-British talks by capitalising on the talks' impact on the market. Soon, talk of the end quickly dissipates and post-colonial discourse becomes merely another excuse to play it big. The crisis of colonialism, therefore, becomes the motivator behind the fervour of capitalist activity in *Looking Back in Anger*.

This fervour is probably no better exemplified than by Hong. Not only does he play the market rigorously, he schemes to marry the daughter of the CEO of one of Hong Kong's most prominent corporations in order to pave his road to the top. He sees his marriage as purely an economic transaction and while this is a defining characteristic of the family empire, Hong makes no pretences about the romance of family and love. As such, Hong unmistakably exposes the contradictions of the family romance and its function in naturalising and depoliticising the ideology of capitalism.

In *Looking Back in Anger*, Hong's turn towards evil comes full circle not in Hong Kong but in Malaysia. He kills both his ex-girlfriend and foster mother there and freely returns to Hong Kong. Malaysia is represented as a place unlike Hong Kong. It is a place where murder is possible, where generals can invoke great fear in ordinary people, where little Indian boys steal and sell the goods they find on dead bodies and where brown men are savagely killed by the police near crowded train stations. In one provocative scene, Geen's ex-girlfriend[38] screams hysterically as a police officer kills a Malaysian man. This man is de-humanised and portrayed as nothing more than a dispensable, bloody and scary body women should fear. The monstrosity characterised by Hong is displaced onto the racialised body in Malaysia. Colonial biases and hierarchies are further revealed when efforts to extradite Hong to Malaysia, where he killed both his ex-girlfriend and foster mother, fails because the Malaysian police could not guarantee that the translations into English of key witness accounts would be accurate. Although the court trial was conducted in Cantonese, English was still centralised as the official medium of communication, which works to marginalise non-English speakers and non-English speaking nations.

This much-used trope of using other places, usually in Southeast Asia, to extend the reach of Hong Kong modernity is a way to map the geopolitics of the region. Hong Kong must be able to envision and position itself in the Asian region if it is to become a financial superpower, a central component of its identity. Furthermore, these places are needed to absorb the excesses of capitalism in order to prevent the system from collapsing on itself when the excesses become too much to handle. The 'popular's' role in Chinatown, in this sense, works in the same way to position Hong Kong in relation to Asian regions in the West. Hong Kong is a super-modern city that produces cultural meanings whereas those in Chinatown merely absorb these meanings, and always with a temporal delay. The role of Hong Kong in Asia is often centralised in relation to the marginalisation of poorer nations such as Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines and the racialised peoples who live

there. In this sense, the deployment of race in Hong Kong TV family melodramas not only positions Chinese immigrants in the United States in relation to their Hong Kong compatriots, it also shapes the way Chinese Americans imagine themselves in relation to other racialised groups in the United States and beyond. Global geopolitical relationships, therefore, also inform domestic racial relations.

As masculinity takes a destructive turn, women are also almost invariably sacrificed in its path of rampage. The anxieties of masculinity are projected onto the bodies of women, and more specifically maternal bodies, in *Looking Back in Anger*. When Hong's ex-girlfriend finds out she is pregnant and wants Hong to marry her, he decides to kill her instead. Hong is wooing his boss's daughter and does not want anything or anyone to get in his way. When his ex-girlfriend persists, he decides the best solution is to get rid of her permanently.[39] Her desire to have a family and be a mother is seen as a threat to Hong. He also kills his foster mother when she finds out what he has done. Mothers threaten male subjectivity and must be destroyed in order to privilege male subject formation. Whereas abject masculinity in *Looking Back in Anger* offers a mirror into the society that has created these monstrous men, women offer another kind of critique, one that shows how masculinity makes its claims on and through women's bodies.

In *Looking Back in Anger*, although Hong is executed in the end, we are left wondering if there will indeed be a peaceful and desirable society. The abject figure is rejected and presumably social order is restored. Geen is left as the heroic figure, a romanticised father-figure, who loves his brother and does everything he could for him but in the end finds out that Hong killed his son.[40] Geen finally realises that his younger brother is irredeemable and colludes with the Malaysian state to capture and execute Hong. Geen plays the father-figure here, always offering love but sometimes dispensing punishment. He holds on to the old-world logic of the importance of fraternal loyalty. In fact, his fraternal loyalties to his ex-prison mates offer an alternative rags-to-riches narrative to the one Hong tells.[41] He is only able to succeed as a businessman because of his reliance on this fraternal network. At face value, it seems that Geen is the ideal masculine subject to be emulated.

However, his wife, Guan, offers a very significant critique of his paternal role, which problematises notions of 'good' patriarchy. She refuses to forgive Geen for the death of their son and believes that Hong is really a product of her husband's doing, who out of family loyalty, Geen has always helped Hong out, including helping him escape punishment for his wrongdoings (until Hong pulls the last straw when he kills Geen's son). She critiques the romanticisation of the good father as remedy for the violence of masculinity. For the figure of the good father continues to perpetuate the logic of patriarchy, which depends on violence against women. By questioning patriarchy, his wife destabilises his sense of himself. When she leaves him, Geen refuses to believe her and promises to wait for her, believing that fate will bring

them back together on the tenth anniversary of their marriage. Geen, holding onto this faith, continues to successfully manage his personal relationships and business. In the very last scene, he is in the church waiting for Guan to show up. In a fit of desperation, he breaks the clock in the church hoping to stop time. The logic of modernity, of time and progress, dissolves into acts of fate and faith. Someone does show up eventually while he's sleeping and slips him a note that reads, 'Guan is dead. Please forget'. It is unclear who the woman is, whether she's Guan or someone else. Geen runs out of the Church shouting Guan's name. In this last scene, the world represented by *Looking Back in Anger* is characterised by uncertainty. It is not the uncertainty of 1997 first introduced in the serial; the crisis of postcolonialism has come and gone with no major consequences for Geen. Rather, it is the uncertainty of Geen's sense of self, the uncertainty of patriarchy and modernity, that lingers on and that marks the future of Hong Kong. Perhaps, if we are on an optimistic note, this uncertainty will activate some creative alternatives and possibilities.

Women end up being the ghosts of the televisual text, reminders of the patriarchal violence of modernity and global capitalism. The feminine, long associated with the domestic, however is in the figure of Guan associated with the fleeting. Women, instead of men, are the ones who are able to leave home. The moment they leave is when men begin to regret the choices they've made and develop a guilty conscience. The act of leaving, therefore, however unknowingly, works in a way to discipline men into the new modern bourgeois subject whose aspirations must never exceed the bounds of his family, an argument I develop below. The domestic, therefore, is at once the private sphere of bourgeois society and takes on transnational, and ephemeral, dimensions. In this way, the local becomes a palimpsest of the familial and the transnational while bypassing questions of nation and statehood altogether. Women become bearers of an emerging transnational consciousness that enacts the cosmopolitan middle-class politics desired for postcolonial Hong Kong.

If abjection is a fundamental element of racialisation[42] and national identity formation,[43] the presence of the abject works to expose the underlying mechanisms of subject formation and the relationship of abjection with broader processes of nation-building and economic modernisation. Yet, abjection and loss are also, as Eng and Kazanjian suggest, 'laden with creative political potential'.[44] The containment of the abject (i.e. Hong) does not in the end entail the restoration of a healthy and content society. What the repression of the abject male brings into view are haunted female figures. Unlike her male counterparts who cannot escape the capitalist fervour of Hong Kong, the obsession over class mobility and the ownership of property, Guan demonstrates her capability to give it all up, including those she love, and moves abroad. She represents the possibilities of straddling both domestic and transnational identities and practices. Most importantly, as an object of desire, she points to something yet unfulfilled.

Looking Back in Anger ends with Geen expressing his willingness to give up his fraternal and filial loyalties and successful business to be with the love of his life. He wants only to live a simple, happy life with his lover. As such, Guan represents a kind of bourgeois, middle-class lifestyle unburdened by the whims of the economy and the demands of politics. What is aimed for, in other words, is the wilful forgetting and occlusion of the politics of colonialism, postcolonialism and Asian modernity. Yet, Guan never returns; this haunts the text by disallowing the fulfilment of a fantasy of romance, family and reunion. Perhaps, the uncertainty that Guan inscribes at the end of the serial opens up room for imagining new, as yet unarticulated possibilities, in faraway places.[45]

For the Chinatown viewer, this serial offers the fantasy of class mobility, and hence a way to escape the poverty and racial abjection that inscribe their experiences. Yet, the presence of the wounded woman and the uncertain ending buffer, in a sense, identification with either the protagonist (the hero) or the antagonist (the abject) and lead us to identify with a different, yet unnamed, future (the female figure). The fantasy of class mobility that the serial builds up collapses in the end, thus inculcating a sense of despair in the face of bourgeois wealth. What we desire is the return of the fleeting woman, which will resolve the contradictions and excesses of capital and fulfil the serial's dream for a future bourgeois existence devoid of politics. Yet she never returns and becomes instead the abject of this fantasy. And in the desire to 'look' for her, we may end up with a new vision, one that must exceed the limits of our location.

Conclusion

In this essay, I treat Hong Kong TV as a kind of chronotope, a concept that Ong and Nonini borrow from Bakhtin to describe 'time-bound, irreversible paths or itineraries of connection between places that are spanned by imagined and remembered narratives of Chinese transnational practices and discourses'.[46] Hong Kong TV permeates the path between Hong Kong and Chinatown and upon reaching Chinatown becomes a part of Asian American culture. On the one hand, I am interested in a critical reading and analysis of Hong Kong TV representations of domesticity, race, class and gender. On the other hand, because of the circulatory nature of these TV texts, it is impossible to analyse these representations as self-contained within the text. In this essay, I have employed critical and cultural theories to explore the ways in which televisual content interanimate with different cultural concerns and contexts (i.e. Hong Kong and Chinatown). In other words, televisual meanings are not constructed out of individual encounters with the televisual text but rather gain legibility through the cultural milieu they travel through and in a sense, emblematise.[47] The disjunctures that arise between reception context(s) in the different ways that televisual texts are given meaning provide a point of departure for understanding transnational

social formations as '*displaced connections*'. Popular culture, specifically television, offers specific strategies of forming a transnational diasporic imaginary, strategies that complement and problematise the institutional and human networks that traverse the path between Hong Kong and Chinatown. I choose to explore the specific relationship between Hong Kong and Chinatown because I see it as a kind of spatial palimpsest paradigmatic of changing forms of globalism and diaspora. It is also my hope that this study provides new ways of thinking about Asian American studies in a transnational framework, which does not take America and Asia as separate categories. Furthermore, this essay asks that we destabilise the notion of Chinatown as an (Orientalist) object and isolated ghetto and to see Chinatown as figured in other ways through its lived relations (and globalised social formations) and popular practices (i.e. TV-viewing). A fruitful extension of this project might be to pursue some of the more sociological and anthropological issues involved in a transnational study of race, gender and class in the particular contexts of Hong Kong and Chinatown.

5 Thailand in the Hong Kong cinematic imagination

Adam Knee

In the effort to more fully understand Hong Kong cinema's global context – and to avoid an over-reliance on sometimes problematic East/West oppositions in doing so – it is particularly productive to examine that cinema's connections to Thailand. Thailand's relationship is especially strong in that the country has long been a significant market for Hong Kong film, in that numerous Hong Kong-Thailand co-productions have been mounted over the years, in that Hong Kong has wielded a strong stylistic influence over Thai cinema, and, perhaps most strikingly, in that Thailand has long been a favourite location for the filming of Hong Kong productions.[1] The importance of Thailand as an overseas market is not surprising considering both its proximity and its substantial population of Chinese descent, a largely urban population responsible, as in other Southeast Asian countries, for a disproportionate amount of the country's economic activity.[2] Indeed, the Hong Kong-Thailand cinematic connection, both in terms of film distribution and co-production, is fostered in part by Sino-Thai involvement in the film business; for example, Sahamongkol Film, one of Thailand's most important distribution and production companies, and the main distributor of Hong Kong films in Thailand, is run by a Sino-Thai family. A number of filmmakers have in fact significantly blurred Hong Kong–Thailand cinematic boundaries with lives and films which straddle both places: Hong Kong-based producer-director Peter Chan, who lived in Thailand as a child, has been involved with a number of high-profile Thai–Hong Kong co-productions through his Applause Pictures, while the Hong Kong-born twins Danny and Oxide Pang are filmmakers whose careers have likewise moved fluidly between Hong Kong and Thailand, as they work on a range of films from each industry, as well as co-productions.

The existence of a strong Sino-Thai community and the ease of movement for film professionals between Hong Kong and Thailand do not, however, go very far toward explaining the prevalence of Thailand location shooting for Hong Kong films. Law Kar and Frank Bren report such location shoots (along with co-production) picking up steam during the 1950s.[3] Indeed, in Cathay's 1959 film *Air Hostess*, an incidental dialogue exchange suggests that Thai locations are by that point already commonplace (an actress en

route to Bangkok tells the air hostess her previous visits to Thailand had only been for film shoots). One of the attractions is clearly the relatively low cost of such location shooting, arising not only from Thailand's proximity, but from the low cost of local personnel and the relative lack of restrictive labour regulations; in more recent years, thanks to the improved fortunes of Thailand's own home-grown film industry, adding to the location's attraction has been an increase in the availability of trained technicians and an improvement in the quality of production and post-production facilities.

But economic motivations do not explain one of the most striking aspects of the phenomenon of Thailand location shooting: the remarkable level of consistency in Hong Kong's cinematic representations of Thailand. Such consistency suggests that Hong Kong's neighbour to the South holds a distinctive symbolic value, a particular fascination for the Hong Kong imagination. Indeed, so stock-in-trade are some of the representations of Thailand in the Hong Kong cinema that a Hong Kong film review on one of the numerous fan websites can claim, 'As you may have learned from Hong Kong movies, Thailand is the sorcery capital of Asia'.[4] Another review on the same site asserts similarly, '[I]n Hong Kong movies a trip to Thailand means at least one of two things: whoring and horror'.[5] In a similar vein, Stefan Hammond's tongue-in-cheek account of sorcery in Hong Kong horror films in his *Hollywood East* focuses specifically on a film set in Thailand and warns:

> Southeast Asia is wild and unruly – filled with odd superstitions, bag-shanties, opium dens, and people not from Hong Kong. … Hong Kong characters visiting Southeast Asia can expect trouble.[6]

The precision of such assertions (which are in fact not altogether off the mark) aside, the clear symbolic value of Thailand within the Hong Kong cinematic discourse is worth examining more in depth – to understand not only its nature, but also the implicit self-apprehension of Hong Kong in relation to this warmer-climed other.

With this interest in mind, the central focus of this essay will be to identify and analyze key features of Hong Kong's cinematic imagination of Thailand. As a means of putting this topic into a manageable form, I will organise this essay on the basis of a number of distinctive, interrelated thematic preoccupations that appear to characterise the imaging of Thailand in these films, most centrally themes relating to the past and to familial ties. I will allow that some of the tendencies I describe are not unique to Hong Kong's representations of Thailand – and also that some of the individual themes I describe exist as well in certain Hong Kong films *not* set in Thailand. Nevertheless, a case can be made that, in the aggregate, the particular and highly consistent constellation of themes that emerges here constitutes a distinctive, Hong Kong-specific cultural discourse, one which merits further consideration.[7]

The past

In film after film, plots turn on past events that are somehow hidden from the present life of main characters, but which eventually erupt; some of the films start by presenting these prior events, while in others they are revealed as a surprise. Consistently, however, past-ness in these scenarios is associated with Thailand, with Hong Kong standing in for the present in contrast. In the Shaw Brothers' *Duel of Fist* (1971), for example, we see the main character (Kan Fe) literally halted in his work as an architectural engineer, building the future of Hong Kong, because of a Thailand-connected past. He is summoned to see his father – it turns out because of the visit of an old uncle from Thailand. The plot thickens when father turns ill and reveals that Fan Ke has a brother about his age, Wenlie, living in Thailand, the son of an old Thai flame, and implores the brother, in his dying breaths, to seek him out. The bulk of the film then focuses on his taking care of this family business in Thailand, eventually finding and coming to the aid of his impoverished kickboxer brother, before he feels free to return to Hong Kong.

Full Contact (1992) likewise concerns the inescapability of past events – in this case embodied in the form of a vengeful Chow Yun Fat, who seeks retribution from Hong Kong gang boss Simon Yam for the murder of a Thai family and disfigurement of a girl in a Bangkok arms deal gone awry, events we see at the film's opening. In Johnny To's *A Hero Never Dies* (1998), quite similarly, two Hong Kong gang bosses must eventually face the vengeance of their respective former bodyguards for having previously betrayed them during gang wars in Thailand. In the case of *Home of a Villain* (2000), yet another gang boss must make amends for his past deeds by way of Thailand; in this instance the gangster's initial misdeeds may have taken place in Hong Kong, but to make amends for them, he needs to return to his family, which has taken up residence in a Thai coastal town. And the complex intrigues of the hit police thriller *Infernal Affairs* (2002) themselves turn out to have antecedents in a Thai-linked past, as revealed in the prequel *Infernal Affairs II* (2003).

Perhaps the most striking instance of a Thai past erupting into a Hong Kong present is in the Pang Brothers' *The Eye* (a 2002 Hong Kong-Thai-Singapore co-production), in which a Hong Kong woman experiences visions because of having received, in a transplant, the eyes of a Thai girl; here we literally see a former Thailand emerge from underneath a present-day Hong Kong in one of her visions. In order to research and resolve her difficulties, she must return to Thailand to discover the source of her ocular gift. It should be noted that the historic-looking Thai past is in fact really only a recent past, despite its antiquated appearance: Even present-day Thailand tends to have a quaintness or past-ness about it in Hong Kong representations, which tend interestingly either *not* to dwell upon Bangkok, a metropolis which in the last few years has come to embody an overheated urban modernity as much as any other major Asian city, or to focus primarily

on more historic-looking districts, such as Chinatown. Hong Kong cinema simply seems by and large unable to imagine Bangkok as a site of modernity. *Duel of Fist* might appear one of the exceptions; though made at a time before Bangkok was overrun with modern skyscrapers, it does dwell on images of two of the most modern structures of its day – The Dusit Thani Hotel and the (late, lamented) Siam Intercontinental Hotel. The clear mirroring of brothers, however, the one a mod, colourfully dressing, affluent architectural engineer, the other a plain-dressing, slum-dwelling kickboxer, leaves no doubt about which metropolis weighs in more heavily on the side of modernity.[8]

On the whole, however, Hong Kong films are far more likely to present images of the resort town Pattaya (as in *Girl with the Long Hair* (1976), *Twinkle Twinkle Lucky Stars* (1985), *Pink Bomb* (1993), *A Fighter's Blues* (2000), *Her Name is Cat 2: Journey to Death* (2000), *The Hong Kong Happy Man* (2000), *Horoscope II: The Woman from Hell* (2000), *Dead Target* (2001), *Devil Eye* (2001), *Don't Let the Sun Go Down* (2001), *Summer Dream* (2002), and *Troublesome Night 13* (2002)) or of rural villages or hill tribe settlements (*King Boxer* (1971), *Heroes Shed No Tears* (1986), *The Seventh Curse* (1986), *Angel Force* (1991), *Mission of Justice* (1992)). Many films include long shots emphasising the open spaces of Thailand's beaches and bays, in formal (if some times only implicit) contrast to the crowded urban spaces of Hong Kong. Images of historic temples and Buddha statues are also common, tied in some instances with an affirmation of traditional religious belief, as in *Home of a Villain*. (*Men Suddenly in Black* [2003] offers a somewhat related example in that a group of Hong Kong wives depart for Thailand with the intent of visiting a temple; however, the women end up turning around before their plane takes off, under suspicions that their husbands are up to no good, so we end up never actually seeing Thailand.) Ayutthaya is a particularly common shooting location for its historic ruins (*The Skyhawk* [1974], *Shaolin Hand Lock* [1978], *Her Name is Cat 2*, *Dead Target*).

One particularly illustrative instance of a film in which Thailand is set up in quaint opposition to Hong Kong's modernity is *The Legend of Speed* (1999). That film's protagonist, Sky, is set up as the embodiment of modern Hong Kong: a handsome, young car-racer, spoiled by his rich family, whose favourite past-time is making expensive modifications to his cars using the latest in high technology, then racing them on the modern highways weaving around Hong Kong's skyscrapers. He is catapulted into a radically contrasted Thailand mid-film, however, both in flight from gangsters and authorities after a race gone bad, and in search of a long-lost father, himself a legendary racer, whom he has only just learned is still alive. He tracks down this missing link to his past now living in Pattaya, where the man makes a simple living giving decidedly low-tech haircuts to neighbourhood boys on a sidewalk. When his father, Black Tone, explains that his meagre earnings, while not enough to survive on in Hong Kong, are ample for Thailand, Sky

points out in amazement that what he has spent on car modification alone in Hong Kong would be enough money to support him his whole life in Thailand. It is in fact this modern technology, Sky admits, that has led to his present troubles, the hi-tech modifications before his last race making it so that the car in effect controlled him, rather than vice versa.

The two agree that the father will train the son in racing, both so that the son can win a local motorcycle race against a Pattaya racer who has challenged them and so that Sky can eventually go back to Hong Kong to avenge both himself and his father against a Hong Kong gangster/racer who has been the cause of both of their woes. However, since Black Tone is now disabled, and since he cannot afford to own any hi-tech equipment himself, the training is done purely through miming and explanation; and while this may not be cinematically very compelling, it clearly drives home the contrast with the hi-tech world of Hong Kong and emphasises the retrieval of the basic human skills Sky previously allowed to atrophy in letting his modern equipment take control. Sky, not surprisingly, then manages to win the Pattaya race, against a visual backdrop strikingly different from those in Hong Kong – one of tourist streets, low-rise buildings – and with a distinctively low-tech vehicle, a motorcycle lacking even working brakes.

Sky so enjoys the relative simplicity of the low-tech, low-income life in Pattaya that he intimates to his father a desire to join him in what he calls his 'paradise'. But Black Tone makes clear (with the automotive metaphor 'Sometimes use brakes, sometimes accelerator') that while such a life may be appropriate for himself, Sky's obligations remain in Hong Kong. Sky's final race back in Hong Kong, against the nemesis of father and son, is in stark contrast the most highly technologised of all. He modifies his car with a computer-driven advanced fuel system, using instructions his late, devoted mechanic (killed in a race against the same nemesis) recorded on a laptop computer. The race is itself represented in a distinctive register, with more modern cinematic technologies than other sections of the film; at points a computer game-like diagram of the relative positions of the cars is superimposed over images of the racers on the Hong Kong highways, and digital techniques are used to distort the visuals at the moment the new fuel system kicks in in order to suggest the extreme speed of Sky's car. After winning the race, however, Sky chooses to burn both the car and the instructions for its modification, a rather clumsy way of suggesting Sky has taken to heart the lessons about basic, low-tech, low-cost human skills and values learned in Thailand.

Family/diaspora

Still another linked association that should already be suggesting itself – along the lines of those between Thailand and the past and Thailand and tradition – is that between Thailand and family. The emphasis, not surprisingly, is on the importance of maintaining traditional Chinese familial

bonds and obligations across geo-political boundaries. Indeed, in *Duel of Fist* it is not made explicit what particular urgency there is for Fan Ke to seek out his brother other than to ensure the sustaining of such familial links, and the theme of familial obligation is reflected on both Hong Kong and Bangkok sides of the narrative in Fan Ke's devotion to his father (in his following of his final wishes) and Wenlie's devotion to his mother (in trying to earn money for an operation she requires, despite the mortal danger in which this may place him). The plot of another Shaw Brothers' film, the 1966 James Bond knock-off *The Golden Buddha*, is also set in motion by a man being called back to Thailand because of a family emergency – and the story's intrigue eventually turns out to concern not 007-like espionage, but an intra-familial struggle over inheritance. In Shaw's *Shaolin Hand Lock*, the protagonist travels to Thailand to seek revenge for his father's murder at home in China, and there finds himself reunited with his mother, whom he had thought dead. *Crocodile River* (1965), *The Big Boss* (1971), and *The Skyhawk* all feature ethnic Chinese characters travelling to Thailand from abroad to visit or live with relatives.

Decades later, in *The Legend of Speed* and *A War Named Desire* (2000), the young protagonists follow in the footsteps of some of their Shaw Brothers predecessors in heading to Thailand in search of long-lost relatives (again, retrieving bonds from the past). In *Legend*, the protagonist Sky is aided in seeking out Black Tone by other Hong Kong migrants he encounters in Bangkok's Chinatown, his first port of call. Tone, it turns out, is now living with a new wife and son, and several sequences show the father's happiness in partaking of these new familial bonds, though he does jokingly complain that his new son does not remember any of the Cantonese he tries to teach him. As a result of Sky's own reaffirmed filial bonds to his father, he eventually determines to return to Hong Kong, as mentioned, in order to seek revenge against a gangster he now learns had wronged Black Tone years before – that is, to fulfil his own newly discovered obligations as a son. In *A War Named Desire*, along somewhat similar lines, the protagonist Jones tracks down a brother who had left his Hong Kong family 15 years before and taken up a life of crime in Thailand; he makes the journey, after the death of their mother, in part to retrieve some money the brother, Charles, had stolen when he had left, but clearly also to reconnect with his last remaining family. Jones's reception from Charles, who now manages the operations of a casino in a town at the Cambodian border, is hardly warm – but owing to a number of plot twists, the two brothers become compelled to help one another out in the midst of internecine Sino-Thai gang warfare, and thereby come to discover their fraternal love and demonstrate their fraternal loyalties. One gesture of brotherly bonding occurs quite literally through the medium of Thai culture, as Jones spreads on his brother's face the white paste used to bestow blessings on others at the Thai New Year's celebrations.

In *Home of a Villain*, the connections between Thailand and familial

obligation are more obvious still: The Hong Kong gangster-protagonist Kit must make amends to his family not only for having ruined his chances of his brother's promotion as a policeman years in the past, but, even more so, for having abandoned them. The still bitter brother, Yan, who has relocated to Thailand and there found a Sino-Thai wife, now works for a local Sino-Thai politician whose platform is one of promoting family values – and the film suggests criticism of the hypocrisy of both Yan and the politician for themselves not truly fostering their own family ties enough. The now-reforming gangster, however, aware that he is soon to die because of lung cancer, manages through a number of convenient plot twists not only to reconcile with his family, but to reinvigorate his brother's appreciation of family ties, and to pave the way for the politician's reconciliation with his daughter. In a final gesture of bonding, in case the theme was not clear enough already, Yan shows up at his dying brother's restaurant with a sign proclaiming its new name: Family. Kit's common-law wife tells us in a final voiceover that she has never returned to Hong Kong; instead, she explains, 'I stay and manage Family for Kit. I must run Family properly'.

Even in films that don't hit you over the head with it quite so artlessly, the importance of upholding Chinese family obligations, and of links to the Sino-Thai community (a broader kind of family bond) are clear. For example, among the events that set the plot of *Full Contact* in motion are Chow Yun Fat's need to help repay debts incurred by his cousin in the conduct of his mother's funeral, and his sending of his girlfriend home to Hong Kong to deposit the ashes of his mother. Chow's later vengefulness is itself instigated by the capricious massacre of a family. In *Leave Me Alone* (2004), a character travels to Thailand from Hong Kong to fulfil his brother's financial obligations, while in *Enter the Phoenix* (2004), the heir apparent of a crime dynasty is summoned back to Hong Kong from Thailand to take over leadership duties upon the death of his father. Even *The Eye* can be read as allegorically about the need to acknowledge subterranean family bonds, here figured as an (initially hidden) bodily inheritance, a deep and inescapable spiritual and racial link to people in another place and time.

The recurrent focus in these films not just on immediate relatives but also on the Chinese community more broadly, figured as both widely present in Thailand and easily transiting to and from a range of other nations with Chinese populations, suggests that Thailand operates in the Hong Kong cinematic imagination not only as an adjunct of familial ties, but as an emblem of the diasporic dimensions of modern Chinese identity. This identity is herein implicitly characterised on the one hand as involving supportive emotional ties to a larger quasi-familial community, but, on the other, as subject to constant movement, uncertainty, and instability, a function of the geographical, national, social, and temporal dispersal of the community. In this regard, it is quite suggestive that in the aforementioned scene of old Thailand emerging into modern Hong Kong in *The Eye*, the shift in spaces is not singular and distinct, but subtle and wavering, the dark imagery dissolving

back and forth between one space and the other repeatedly, and thus evoking a consciousness that is neither solidly here nor there, now nor then, but rather hovers uncertainly among realms, never on solid ground.

Indeed, in one sense in these films we are presented with an identity that is quite literally floating – through a profusion of images of travel by air and by water, and a heavy emphasis on water imagery and coastal and river environments in many of the films, often in moments when connections to distant places are being considered. Thailand, moreover, naturally lends itself to such a tendency in representation, given not only the extensiveness of its coastal regions, rivers, and canals, but the historical importance of water in the development of its national culture.[9] In *Legend of Speed*, for example, most of the pivotal scenes involving the regeneration of bonds between father and son are filmed with an ocean backdrop, and the emotionally wrought scene of the son departing Pattaya to return to Hong Kong is dramatised (most improbably) as a departure by boat, rather than plane. The narrative of *Shaolin Hand Lock* is likewise punctuated by images of passage over water, often involving the break-up or re-formation of a family; the final reunion of a mother with children newly revealed as being hers occurs against the backdrop of Ayutthaya ruins reached after a short boat trip from Bangkok (the film's geography in fact suggesting a closer placement than in reality). And *Crocodile River*, one of the only Hong Kong films set in its entirety in Thailand, is organised around the conceit of the title river as a medium that both links and separates two established Chinese families with a long standing feud. The film's Romeo-and-Juliet plot concerns a forbidden love affair between progeny of the two families (naturally fraught with images of covert river crossings), but the most crucial deviation from the Shakespearean model is also precisely the factor which makes clear the film's central interest in issues of Chinese identity: Tensions among the families are assuaged when a formerly hidden blood link between the two sides is revealed. In the tragic mode, this revelation comes too late to save the lovers, who are devoured by crocodiles, but their sacrifice precipitates the construction of a bridge between the two banks of the river at the film's close. Thus, it is implied, while passage between two lands is potentially uncertain and dangerous, ethnic solidarity across geographical divides can help obviate such difficulties.

A War Named Desire is one of the more self-conscious of recent Thailand-set films with respect to such themes of migration and ethnic identity. The film's emblematic image, shown under the opening titles and again near the close of the film, is at once evocative of transit, danger, and loss: to the accompaniment of melancholy Cantopop, Charles's car glides swiftly down a Thai highway at sunset as he drives his brother, with whom he has bonded profoundly as a result of their struggles against a rival gang member. But their communication is hindered, as Jones is traumatised by recent bullet wounds, perhaps unable to hear Charles's quiet pleas for him to remain conscious. The car itself is a wreck of shattered glass. And we are given no

sense of where the car is, and where the protagonists are heading: It is an image of swift and unimpeded, but directionless and sorrowful movement, with blood brothers travelling in unison but incapable of direct communication.

The brief sequence of shots which follows the final showing of this emblematic image reinforces the sense of uneasy movement, of potential loss of those to whom one is connected. As the Cantopop continues on the soundtrack, we see shots of Jones convalescing in Hong Kong with his Taiwanese girlfriend intercut with shots of Charles, a fugitive from the gang life he has now quit, moving from one Thai locale to another, on foot, by boat, and by van; images of movement across water in particular comprise a visual dominant in the sequence, evocative here of themes of both migration and instability, the lack of solid ground. We simultaneously hear the text of the brothers' letters to one another, their communication from afar: Charles indicates that his 'punishment' for his past is now not to be at peace, searching for a home, while Jones explains that what he has learned from his experience is that whether 'in Hong Kong, Taiwan, or Thailand, it's so important that you can live with the one you love'. This is a luxury that the conditions of diasporic existence afford one brother, but withhold from the other.

Mobility/freedom/escape

Another Thai association that the preceding account of Hong Kong films begins to suggest is an association with mobility, freedom of movement – albeit a freedom that proves a double-edged sword, facilitating both the reunion of families and the break-up of families through migration. Thailand is figured as a place that allows both ease of trans-border movement and the unimpeded circulation of foreigners once they have arrived. Foreigners of Chinese ethnicity are naturally those emphasised the most in the Hong Kong films, but these films also show Thailand as an arena where Chinese, Westerners, Thais, and people from other Asian countries mix freely; and establishing shots of Thai settings often include whites (for example, *Horoscope II* introduces Thailand by showing some whites enjoying a hotel pool). Freedom of movement is perhaps most strongly literalised in films featuring Thai-located motorcycle or car racing sequences, such as *Legend of Speed* or *Against All* (1990).

This sense of a freedom from regulation extends in some of these films to the representation of Thailand as a place where criminal activity can occur relatively unimpeded as well, as a place where characters may choose to take liberties of all kinds. The most common criminal emphasis is on drug dealing (as in *The Big Boss* or the *Infernal Affairs* series), with a number of such films making reference to both the porosity and the profusion of Thailand's borders with other nations – conditions which, in combination with the personal freedoms Thailand affords, make it an ideal conduit for drug traffic.

Such border regions are a focus, for example, in *Heroes Shed No Tears*, *Angel Force*, *Dead Target*, *Mission of Justice*, and *A War Named Desire*. Other films show, or make reference to, Thai based or mediated border-crossing dealings in arms, artefacts, counterfeit money, real or counterfeit jewellery, and body parts. (In *Angel Force*, a kidnapped Westerner is the transited 'merchandise', brought from Hong Kong to Burma by way of Thailand.)

The freedom from the regulations and pressures that people experience elsewhere also contributes to Thailand's figuration as an escape of various kinds in the Hong Kong cinema: The country serves as a welcome antidote to the high-speed, high-tech, high-finance Hong Kong existence. Thailand is represented as a vacation destination at least as far back as 1959's *Air Hostess*. One of the single most common plot premises among Hong Kong films set in Thailand is that of the tour group or group of friends on a vacation visit abroad – for example, in *Girl With the Long Hair*, *Twinkle, Twinkle Lucky Stars*, *Pink Bomb*, *Devil Eye*, and *Summer Dream*. *Duel of Fist*, though ostensibly not about a tourist trip, dwells on numerous excursions to tourist attractions and hotels, as Fan Ke is determined to mix sightseeing pleasure with family business; and *Crocodile River* and *King Boxer* likewise take the opportunity to include touring sequences within their narratives. Other tourist escapes typically detailed in many of the films include boating, swimming, eating seafood, shopping, viewing kickboxing, getting massage, and (as noted further below) visiting go-go bars. In many of the crime-themed films, on the other hand, Hong Kong gangsters use Thailand as an escape from authorities or other gangsters, a hide-out, a place to lay low until the heat is off or injuries are healed – as in *Full Contact*, *Legend of Speed*, *A War Named Desire*, *Runaway* (2001), and *Infernal Affairs II*. *Legend* and *War* both also make explicit reference to Thailand as offering an escape from the financial pressures of high-cost Hong Kong, as characters comment on how much easier it is to live well in Thailand on relatively little money; and the topic is discussed extensively by vacationers in *Troublesome Night 13* as well.

Nature/the supernatural

One of the factors that makes Thailand such a welcome escape from Hong Kong in these films is its profusion of nature, suggested, for example, in the aforementioned emphasis on water imagery. The tourist destinations presented in these films tend to be natural ones, beaches (usually Pattaya) in particular. The noted de-emphasis on urban imagery goes in hand with an emphasis on the rural, for example images of homes immersed in greenery, reachable only by canal; many films also include jungle treks and the occasional elephant encounter. Thailand itself in effect becomes an inexpensive natural resource, ready to be used for the benefit of travelling Hong Kong urbanites.

It is not only Thailand's natural attractions that help position it in contrast to Hong Kong's modernity in these films; a strong association with the supernatural reinforces this contrast as well. For example, the disruption of the young Hong Kong woman's life in *The Eye* is not only an intrusion of a past foreign inheritance, but also of the supernatural – an eruption of inexplicable forces (specifically linked to Thailand) into the modern, rational, positivist medical present of Hong Kong. Other examples of the Thai association with the supernatural – in particular with sorcery and black magic – abound: In *Forever Young* (1989), five vacationing Hong Kong friends are turned into children by a Thai witchdoctor's brew. In *Horoscope II*, two Hong Kong medical doctors – that is, practitioners of modern science – run afoul of a sorceress while attending a conference in Pattaya and have to pay the consequences. In *The Seventh Curse* it is likewise a modern medical practitioner who finds himself the victim of a supernatural curse when doing research in the north of Thailand; this occurs in part because he ignores warnings about the powerful witchcraft of a tribe he spies upon, insisting that as a man of science he doesn't believe in it. In *Devil Eye*, a young Hong Kong vacationer finds both herself and her modern technology – her digital video camera – haunted by the spirit of a woman whose death in a car accident she has inadvertently recorded. Among the other films including representations of Thai witchcraft or sorcery or other forms of the supernatural, often in a fearful context, are *Twinkle, Twinkle Lucky Stars*, *The Eternal Evil of Asia* (1995), *Exodus from Afar* (1998), and *Troublesome Night 13*.

Romance/sex

The escape that Thailand affords in many of the films is not only an escape into nature, but also into romance and/or sex, in a realm where one of the freedoms is in sexual activity, and where the sex-workers themselves constitute another 'natural resource' for the Hong Kong tourist. Many films feature the expected go-go bar scene, sometimes as a Thailand establishing shot, and many also involve amorous pursuits, attempted adulterous dalliances, and/or sex-for-hire; even one of the would-be travellers who stays in Hong Kong to make sure her man is being faithful in *Men Suddenly in Black* is heard briefly chatting on the phone to an apparent Thai boyfriend. In *Air Hostess*, the two main Hong Kong protagonists, whose potential romance is thwarted because of their on-going squabbling, finally manage to apologise to one another while walking in Bangkok. Interestingly, the would-be love interest, here a pilot, explains his usual irritability at work with, 'I can't control myself when I am in the sky. It's like I am part of a machine, with no emotions'. – so here, in effect, Thailand gets linked to romance in part by way of its opposition to modern technology. And in *The Legend of Speed*, another film which, as already discussed, establishes an opposition between Thailand and modern technology, part of Black Tone's happiness clearly

derives from the plainly low-tech amorous attentions of his wife, who works as a masseuse during the day. ('He's so horny he won't die young', an old acquaintance of Tone's intimates to Sky.)

The sense of sexual freedom or non-regulation associated with Thailand in these films extends in some instances even to gender and sexuality. Thai female impersonators figure into the plots of *Twinkle, Twinkle Luck Stars*, *Dead Target*, and *Summer Dream*, among others. The son to be summoned home to lead the criminal organisation in *Enter the Phoenix* is gay, and the film suggests a link between this and his choice of residence in Thailand, one of the criminal associates noting (just prior to the title credit), 'As they say: For girls, go to Mongkok, but for boys, it's Bangkok'. Interestingly, both *Enter the Phoenix* and *Leave Me Alone*, in which a gay Hong Kong man travels to Bangkok to aid his heterosexual twin brother, hinge on plot twists in which straights must masquerade as gay and vice-versa, in both cases allowing a sense of free play in terms of sexuality and expanding the sexual awareness of various characters.[10]

It is relevant that amorous pursuit and sexual license are also aligned with the aforementioned themes of the supernatural in a number of these films, both love and the supernatural being ethereal forces that go beyond the bounds of rational logic and analysis. In *Twinkle, Twinkle Lucky Stars*, one of the numerous characters goes to see a witch doctor while in Pattaya in order to improve his attractiveness to women, while in *Horoscope II*, the sorceress uses her magic to exact revenge upon the two doctors after they each love her and leave her, and a Hong Kong authority on sorcery who helps one of the doctors in fact explains that spells had originally developed as a tool to maintain love; it is just such love spells which cause the protagonists many of their difficulties in *The Eternal Evil of Asia* and *Exodus from Afar*. We also see the alignment of sex and the supernatural in the horror comedy *Ghostly Vixen* (1990), where an evil female spirit in Bangkok seeks to have sex with willing male victims in order to grant herself immortality; she soon makes her way to Hong Kong, bringing her deadly sexuality with her, by hiding in a mah jong set made up by a Sino-Thai craftsman for a Hong Kong client.

The sense of sexual panic implied here – of a deadly sexuality which can spread across borders – obtains in various ways in other Thai-shot Hong Kong films as well, in part through passing reference to AIDS (for example, in showing would-be sex-tourists fearful of infection in *Pink Bomb* and *The Eternal Evil of Asia*). In *The Seventh Curse*, the research trip to the north is with the express purpose of finding herbs to treat AIDS. It is sexual desire, moreover – a fascination with a beautiful tribeswoman – that leads the protagonist into being foolhardy enough that his actions attract the wrath of the head sorcerer. The curse he suffers as a result is explicitly figured as an affliction of the blood, one which manifests itself in an explosive form of haemorrhaging – which seems coincidentally to occur at moments the protagonist experiences sexual desire. Yet another way his affliction is linked to

Asian discourses about AIDS is that it first manifests itself in the film's plot in a scene where he attempts to make love to a sexually aggressive Western woman. Another instance of this kind of displaced sexual panic, linked with Thailand, occurs in *The Legend of Speed*, where soon after Sky's arrival in Thailand, his Hong Kong rivals attempt to kill him – with a syringe full of HIV-infected blood.

Hong Kong's Thai-set films thus display a complex ambivalence in their representation of Thailand's relationship to love and sex. Thailand is on the one hand the site of a potentially deadly sexual chaos, with the ability to tempt otherwise properly behaved Hong Kongers into adulterous or sexually prurient behaviour. It is on the other hand an arena for the potentially generative expression of otherwise closeted emotions and desires, a space allowing needed gratifications and fulfilments, in some instances thereby producing the love relationships that lay the groundwork for the families also so valued in these films.

Such ambivalence can indeed be seen as characteristic of the Hong Kong cinema's outlook on Thailand as a whole. Thailand is constructed in many ways as being Hong Kong's inferior and therefore as fraught with dangers: It is shown as lawless, socially and technologically backwards, less developed and less prosperous and as a result has the potential to threaten Hong Kong and its denizens with crime and disease. Yet it is precisely Thailand's lack of modern development and regulation (at least as the country exists in Hong Kong's cinematic imagination) that makes the country so attractive, functioning as the non-urban, old-fashioned, tradition-, family-, religion-, and magic-aligned anti-thesis to (and escape from) Hong Kong's modern, crowded, loveless, rational cosmopolitanism. The very profusion of Thai-set titles alone suggests to what extent the country holds a fascination for Hong Kong and offers the promise of the fulfilment of profound needs. Indeed, in this sense, Thailand arguably becomes an allegorical closet in which reside the true and hidden desires of Hong Kong and an entire realm of mysteries and alliances repressed in modern life. Thailand offers a way to get back to what has been paved over in contemporary, urban Hong Kong existence, connections to nature, past, family, and diaspora. It simultaneously serves as a rich resource, of people, products, and materials, of which Hong Kong, by virtue of its economic power, can readily avail itself.

While this essay has primarily been a discussion of discourse – that is to say, while I have not, for the most part, been making claims about the actual nature of Thailand and Hong Kong or about the films' accuracy in representation – the transnational dynamic that the films articulate clearly does indeed have 'real world' correspondences, in many ways meshing with the actual material, economic, cultural and political relations between Hong Kong and Thailand, not least the significant Chinese connection between the two lands. Indeed one immediate way the 'reality' of these films can be seen operating is in their very production contexts, which their narratives in some sense allegorise: Hong Kong filmmakers travel to Thailand to use its

natural resources as a touristic backdrop against which to film Hong Kong performers with both Hong Kong and low-cost Thai labour, largely absenting and/or disrespecting the local culture, yet at the same time dependent upon it as a resource, fascinated with it as a subject matter, and making use of Thailand's dearth of industry regulation – that Thai freedom, that license – to ease and economise the production process.[11]

6 Hong Kong-Australian imaginaries

Three Australian films by Clara Law

Tony Mitchell

The Macau-born, Hong Kong-Australian director Clara Law, who moved from Hong Kong to Melbourne in 1995, has made three films in Australia, *Floating Life* (1996), *The Goddess of 1967* (2000) and *Letters to Ali* (2004), all co-written with her partner Eddie Fong and set in Australia. Like most of the previous films they made in Hong Kong, such as *Farewell China* (1991) and *Autumn Moon* (1992), their Australian films explore themes of migration and displacement, notions of home and intercultural interpersonal relations. *Floating Life* takes the form of a quasi-ritualised encounter between a Hong Kong family who migrate to Australia and their new homeland, *The Goddess of 1967* dramatises an encounter between a Japanese vintage car fanatic, a blind Irish-Australian girl, their inner demons and the Australian Outback, and *Letters to Ali* is a personalised film-essay about a Melbourne family's attempt to adopt an Afghan asylum-seeker which also deals autobiographically with Law's own feelings about being a Chinese migrant in Australia. All three are 'arthouse' films which engage both thematically and stylistically with exile, displacement and the search for home in Australia, and have marked Law as an important 'diasporic multicultural' Australian film maker,[1] a Hong Kong artist in exile and a transnational, cosmopolitan director who continues to exhibit her films at international festivals. Influenced by Ozu and Tarkowsky, whose film *Mirror* she introduced on Australia multicultural television channel SBS in 1999, Law and Fong reacted strongly against the commercial pressures of the Hong Kong film industry, which had a conditioning impact on the production of Law's first film, the romantic comedy *The Other Half and the Other Half* (1988) and her Leon Lai vehicle about an abortive business venture *Fruit Punch* (1991). Nonetheless in both these films she still attempted to explore themes of migration and exile, such as the 'astronaut syndrome' in the former and migration to Australia in the latter, albeit in a decidedly lighthearted vein. This essay examines her journey into new thematic and stylistic directions since moving to Australia, as well as critical reception of the three films she has made there, and her emergence as a transnational film maker.

Floating Life: from a house in Hong Kong to a house in Australia (and a house in Germany)

Floating Life has become a major Australian film for a number of reasons. Made in a combination of English, German and Cantonese, it was the first foreign language Australian film to be nominated for an Academy Award for Best Foreign Film; it won a Silver Leopard Award at the Locarno Film festival, and was nominated for three Australian Film Institute Awards (best director for Law, best screenplay for Law and Fong and best supporting actress for former SBS veejay and TV announcer Annette Shun Wah). But as a 'foreign' arthouse film, it was seen by very few audiences in Australia, Chinese diasporic or otherwise – it ran to largely empty cinemas for little more than two weeks in the main cities, although it was acclaimed at the 1996 Sydney and Melbourne film festivals, and was subsequently screened five times on the Australian multicultural TV network SBS. (SBS included a clip from the film in the montage of its output assembled to advertise the channel's 2000 Global Outstanding Achievement Award, an indication of SBS's association with *Floating Life* as a co-producer, and the film's own global orientation, as well as signalling the film as an ideal example of the local production values and content of the channel.) *Floating Life* is also widely studied in film courses on Australian university curricula, partly because it problematises notions of an Australian 'national cinema', given its almost exclusively Chinese focus and relative lack of concern with Australian-based issues of migration in what is ultimately a very positive portrayal of a Hong Kong family's integration into Australia.

The growing body of critical writings about *Floating Life* also signals its importance in fashioning a transnational Australian cinema, albeit positioning it in contrasting ways. The film has been read according to conventional (and outmoded) notions of an 'Australian Self' and compared to previous Australian films which deal with non-Anglo-Australian migrants as the 'othered' victims of a repressive, intolerant nation-state,[2] and as an exploration of hybrid Australian notions of home, in contrast to the Anglo-Australian norms of home and belonging represented in *The Castle*, a collectively made 1997 nostalgic comedy about a family refusing to be evicted from their home next to an airport.[3] Felicity Collins has located *Floating Life* evocatively within a shared feminist, 'othering' discourse of 'bringing the ancestors home' in the context of a traditionally white, masculine Australian landscape, alongside Aboriginal Australian film maker Rachel Perkins' study of conflict among three sisters *Radiance* (1998) and Margot Nash's contrast of Anglo-Australian and Aboriginal neighbours in *Vacant Possession* (1995). Collins suggests that the final scene of *Floating Life*, in which the grand-daughter Mui Mui expresses her future vision of a united family in Germany, offers a 'genealogical resolution to a transnational and diasporic history' which sets it very much apart from *Radiance* and *Vacant Possession*, as does the final rehabilitation by Mum of the second daughter Bing, which

Collins describes as 'an emotional sequence unprecedented in Australian cinema' and as contributing to 'a unique image of the mother in Australian cinema'.[4] US critic David Eng's Freudian reading of *Floating Life* as a representation of 'postcolonial Hong Kong subjectivity' and of an experience of immigration with Freudian overtones of mourning, loss and melancholia assumes contentiously that 'full assimilation' into Australia is the family's desirable goal.[5] The film has also been characterised as a ritual conflict between Asian migrants and an initially hostile Australian environment which they succeed in taming, as an exploration of Aihwa Ong's notion of 'flexible citizenship',[6] and as a postmodern film 'symptomatic of [an] uncanny and ubiquitous cross-cultural liminality' which is both Australian and Hong Kong in its identity.[7] It has been regarded as highlighting Asian migrant displacement and 'the diasporic condition of homesickness and the longing for belonging',[8] and as a representation of Confucian nostalgia for filial piety as a panacea for the pains of migration, and the *luodi shenggen* approach to migration where permanent roots are planted in the adopted country, in a critique which unjustifiably damns the film for what are read as elements of didacticism, melodrama and parody.[9] In 'Framing Strategies: *Floating Life* and the Limits of "Australian Cinema"', Rai Jones critiques Tom O'Regan's relegation of the film to a multicultural sub-category of Australian national cinema and argues that considering the film as Australian involves excluding aspects which 'engage with spaces outside the Australian national space', such as the way the film references multiple national spaces, uses 'partiality of vision as a textual strategy' and engages with notions of transnationalism and diaspora.[10] Perhaps most interestingly, the film has been interpreted as an illustration of Edward Said's concept of the 'median state' of the exile caught between homeland and new country, becoming both an 'adept mimic' and 'secret outcast', and ultimately showing that 'cultural convergence can be achieved through transformation and compromise'.[11] Ma, an English teacher from mainland China based in Australia since 1995, is closest to the migrant experience portrayed in *Floating Life*, and her reading is arguably given anchorage by Law's suggestion that 'living floatingly' can be a positive experience as well as a negative one:

> *Floating Life* describes most aptly for me the world of an immigrant. An immigrant is cut off from history, both from one's personal history and the nation's history. He/She has to learn to live 'floatingly'. What does existence mean away from one's country, the non-existence of an existence when one is cut off from one's roots? Yet aren't we all transient beings passing through this place called Earth?[12]

This existential notion of a perpetually transient state of 'living floatingly', which suggests interesting tensions between Law's own position as a cosmopolitan film director and the material, psychological and religious dilemmas and conflicts of the characters in the film, hints at a positive reading of

diasporic migrant mobility which operates independently from nation states in constructing a fluid sense of identity which is able to benefit from its liminality. Arguably it also suggests possibilities for resolution of the traumas of the migrant experience within the narrative progression of *Floating Life*, reaching towards Appadurai's notion of a transnational identity that does not 'depend on the isomorphism of citizenship with cultural identity, of work with kinship, of territory with soil, or of residence with national identification'.[13] The film's intimations of a positive, liminal immigrant state of 'in-betweeness' serve to locate it within much broader social and existential parameters than simply being an 'issue-based' quasi-generic film about Asian migrants undergoing a painful rite of passage in adapting to the Australian nation-state.

Critics and reviewers both inside and outside Australia have commented on the apparent lack of a social and political context in *Floating Life*'s representation of Chinese migration to Australia, and the lack of interaction between its Chinese characters and normative Anglo-Australians,[14] an observation which Law has answered by emphasising that:

> the approach is not a naturalistic approach. What we want to deal with is the inner worlds of the immigrants, what it's like … to be cut off from your roots, and try to build and to plant new roots in a new soil. That actually is more important, that area is what we should focus on, instead of showing how they relate to others.[15]

The focus on the Chinese immigrant characters throughout *Floating Life* is interior, psychological, spiritual and central; indeed, as Pettman has noted:

> the film's depiction of actual Australians (whatever such a fraught term may mean) is fleeting and peripheral, as if they themselves are ghostly apparitions haunting the fringes of the landscape … whereas the newly arrived immigrants are vivid and fully materialised.[16]

This 'reverse perspective' in which suburban Australia is viewed and experienced as a ghost town, and where mainstream notions of Australian everyday life have no applicability, arguably constitutes one of the film's chief values as an important object of study as the first comprehensive dramatisation of Asian migration in Australia. Yue has read the film's portrayal of the Sydney suburb in *Floating Life* as a liminal test of Australian citizenship,[17] but this arguably applies to only one character in the film, the agoraphobic second daughter Bing, who suffers a nervous breakdown as a result of her fanatical desire to steer her family into assimilationist conformity. The Sydney suburb in *Floating Life* is as metaphorically vacant and depopulated as the deserted Hong Kong cityscape in *Autumn Moon*, but its ghost town characteristics are actual rather than metaphorical.[18]

Floating Life charts the Chan family's struggles towards a sense of belonging in their suburban home almost entirely on their own terms, (and they are economically self-sufficient enough to achieve this relatively easily in material terms) and there is little or no representation of conflicts with Australian norms of citizenship. Indeed, it is Bing who finally is seen to require transformation through her mother's agency into traditional Chinese notions of cultural citizenship after she suffers a nervous breakdown. Prior to this, she has ranted to her younger brothers about how 'the house smells of AIDS' after she finds food and pornographic magazines in the boys' room, and comically censured her parents: 'You're here as migrants, not to enjoy yourselves.' Elsewhere, as Stephen Teo has pointed out, she says 'You're here because you are fleeing your country', using the Chinese phrase *zou nan*, which designates refugees, and alludes to the wave of emigration from Hong Kong after the Tiananmen Square massacre in Beijing in 1989, when emigration figures rose markedly.[19] Bing clearly represents the psychological dangers of over-assimilation, while continuing to regard her migrant status as a necessary affliction; despite her moral condemnations of Australian values and her view of average Australians as decadent and lazy, she is dictatorial about succeeding in adapting to the ways of the new country. The most drastic measure she takes in her regime of enforced assimilation is to forbid her parents to burn incense offerings to their ancestors in the house, because of the fire hazard they may represent. It is this action which most tellingly illustrates her own deracinated, 'floating' status as a displaced migrant, for whom ancestors no longer have significance.

As Shelly Kraicer has pointed out, *Floating Life*'s three principal settings, Hong Kong, Sydney and Munich, are stylistically delineated as subjectively different physical spaces by Law, her Australian cinematographer Dion Beebe, and the film's production designer Yee Chung Man. This is done through the use of highly distinctive colour codes which are created by contrasting uses of film stocks, filters and levels of exposure. The different colour definitions provide a stylised, expressionistic view of each city which suggests the different family members' perceptions and impressions of their different environments. The Sydney sequences, shot in summer, are over-exposed and bleached-out, conveying a harsh, stark brightness which suggests the prevalent glaring impact Australian light has on visitors from the northern hemisphere and elsewhere. These contrast markedly with the more 'neon-bright, detail packed and full colour spectrum' of the Hong Kong scenes, which as Kraicer suggests, convey in rich browns and darker colours 'the look, through the distorting mirror of anguished memory, of all the life left behind'.[20] The sequences in Germany, shot in winter, are more subdued and misty, with green pastel shades and dark blues predominant, reflecting the more sombre and subtle tones of European topography. So even in its differing cinematographic cartographies of place, the film offers aesthetic representations of the identity conflicts and disorientations which

its characters embody and enact in their respective displacements between Hong Kong, Australia and Germany.

Structured in a series of episodes, located in each of the three habitats, which are introduced by 'Chinese-style' printed hieroglyphic titles in English and Chinese referring to different houses, the film relates the experiences of the different family members, and some episodes are narrated in voice-overs, or contain lengthy monologues by the various characters. The narrative shifts in location are linked by communication or conflicts between family members, and the titles signal these shifts: A House in Australia, A House in Germany, A House in Hong Kong, A House in China (the family's ancestral home rhetorically invoked through its absence), A House without a Tree, A House in Turmoil and A Big House (these three all in Sydney) and finally Mui Mui's House (the family's grand-daughter's future ancestral home in Germany). This narrative strategy of houses serves to direct the film towards a progression through shifting and evolving ideas of home.

As Louie has indicated,[21] filial piety as a key to neo-Confucian family harmony is a pivotal theme of the film, and this is illustrated in a scene in which Pa disappears from Bing's house in order to meet up with an old friend who has recently returned to Mainland China. As his second daughter Yen mobilises the family to search for him, we see him with his friend, who shows him a picture of his ancestral home in China, which he realises he will never see again. The intertitle of the scene announces 'A House in China'. The two old men lament a general lack of 'filial devotion' and then say farewell, probably for the last time, since Pa's friend has migrated to the USA. Mum's prayer to her ancestors in Bing's house at the end of the film signals a resolution of the family's problems of filial piety. Mum lies on the floor in reverence to her ancestors, and confesses, 'I haven't paid you enough filial respect'. Pa manages to achieve resolution of the family's dilemmas by projecting a Chinese pond and a tea plantation in the backyard of his Australian home, an image of cultural transplantation which suggests a form of social and cultural integration greatly different from Australian notions of assimilation.

In contrast to Australian and US commentators, Chinese reviewers of the film in Taiwan were sharply critical of its portrayal of the migrant experience. The Golden Horse Film Festival Committee in Taiwan suggested 'it is well worth applying reverse logic when responding to the direct way Clara Law's *Floating Life* confronts its viewers with its overstated sadness and homesickness'. Hu Xing Chi also commented on the 'multiply marginalised' status of the film's protagonists, but noted how Hong Kong emigrant friends saw the film's portrayal of their struggles as 'a betrayal of the migrant experience' and as 'giving the West a bad impression'.[22] But the film was also characterised as 'a good example to study of a Hong Kong national film which explores the Hong Kong experience' of migration by another Taiwanese film critic, Li Ya Mei.[23] These readings suggest it may have more appeal to Western viewers who are able to sympathise with the transmigrational

predicament of the film's Chinese characters from a distance than to Chinese audiences who may find its emphasis on homesickness excessive. At the 1997 Philadelphia Festival of World Cinema, it was lauded as 'the first Australian film about the Chinese diaspora, and the first to deal meaningfully with the immigrant experiences of recent arrivals from Hong Kong'. As Law and Fong have acknowledged, translocating to outer-suburban Melbourne was a result of a discovery that 'our audience is not just Hong Kong – it's a select group, but it's worldwide'.[24] Consequently *Floating Life*'s status as a significant contribution to Australian national cinema is a matter of contestation, just as its identity as a Hong Kong film is also disputable. This places Law and Fong in a liminal, transnational position in which they are neither Hong Kong directors nor Australian directors, but can benefit from Australian government funding and distribution while retaining their international identities and reputations as Hong Kong film makers (but are also subject to the comparatively restrictive Australian union regulations of film making, as Law has indicated).[25] And it is a similar dual identity which the Chan family is striving to achieve in transplanting their Chinese heritage into an Australian habitat. But as Law stated, their own transcultural hybrid identity is also an attempt to erase national borders altogether:

> It actually has no meaning for me, being an Australian, or Hong Kong, or Chinese director. I'm still what I am: I'm not totally Eastern or totally Western, you know, an embodiment of cultures. It's more like dealing with a different system here, and how to overcome the difficulties. That's more my concern than the fact that I'm Australian now, and so have to behave like an Australian or think like an Australian.[26]

As Pettman has noted, the film is 'symptomatic of [an] uncanny and ubiquitous cross-cultural liminality', adding that: 'An Australian film critic [David Stratton] calls it "one of the most beautiful Australian films of the past few years", while the Hong Kong industry considers it merely an expatriate extension of their industry.'[27] On the one hand, it is an Australian-produced film with a cast consisting almost entirely of non-professional Chinese-Australian actors (including the executive director of the museum of Chinese Australian History, who plays Pa), with a promotional flyer proudly proclaiming that 'no Australian film has told this story before'.

The Goddess of 1967: a Citroën's journey through the Outback

Critical responses to *The Goddess of 1967* were decidedly mixed, ranging from prominent critic Adrian Martin's eulogy of it in the Melbourne *Age* as 'undoubtedly one of the most exciting and ground-breaking Australian movies of the year' to Richard Phillips' damning critique of it on the *World Socialist Web Site* it as 'confused, pretentious and essentially coldhearted …

heavy handed and tiresome … the film contains no fresh insights and is a cold and misanthropic work'.[28] The film won Best Film and Best Director awards at the 2000 Chicago film festival, but many reviewers found it self-conscious, confusing, laboured and uneven in its characterisations and dramatic structure, with the use of bleach bypass cinematography and other non-naturalistic visual effects such as pixilation for the Tokyo sequences by *Floating Life* cinematographer Dion Beebe also attracting negative criticism. Even Fiona A. Villella's sustained, relatively sympathetic critique of the film in *Senses of Cinema* found that:

> ideas of story and character remain conventional and clichéd … a series of themes … explored in an essentially heavy-handed, overblown and clichéd style … The 'heart of darkness' scene, in which the full grotesqueness of Grandpa is revealed in almost comic book style, is overly dramatic and indulgent … a facile, pretentious exercise … *The Goddess of 1967* is ultimately undermined by a denial of the full clinching of style and content. Its dazzling postmodern landscape ultimately collapses under the weight of reductive and simplistic ideas of character and story.[29]

While these judgments appear harsh taken out of context, they are also difficult to disagree with. In contrast to the taut, intensely economical, episodic structure of *Floating Life*, *The Goddess of 1967* appears to meander through a random series of narrative events involving spectacular Australian Outback surfaces, a loosely defined road movie which almost continually flashes back and forth in time, mostly within the past life of its female protagonist, in an attempt to link her traumatic past experiences of abuse by her grandfather and fanatical Catholic repression by her mother with her Japanese travelling companion's memories of a friend's death in a car crash and his computer fraud and integrate them into some kind of narrative synthesis.

It is noteworthy that there are no Aboriginal signifiers of the Australian Outback, either sonic or visual, in the film, which appears to define its reading of the Outback in exclusively European, Anglo-Celtic and Japanese terms. The Citroën and Grandpa's idiosyncratic wine making (he even attempts to make a Chateau Neuf du Pape in the remote underground settlement of Lightning Ridge) are particularly strong signifiers which give *The Goddess of 1967* a European arthouse orientation which led to more positive responses in Europe than in Australia.

With its intercultural relationship involving a Japanese visitor and a local, *Autumn Moon* can be seen as a narrative paradigm for *The Goddess of 1967*, although it is, importantly, Law's first film in which no Chinese or Hong Kong-based characters appear, and it is in the central situation of a young Japanese man visiting a foreign country for the first time rather than in largely dual character-based narrative structure where the affinities with the

earlier film lie. JM ('Japanese Man'), a Tokyo-based IT worker and vintage car enthusiast, comes to Australia in pursuit of a 1967 Citroën DS (Déesse – the Goddess of the title), and embarks on a journey into the Outback with a blind Australian girl BG ('Blind Girl' – a role for which Rose Byrne won a best actress award at the 2000 Venice Film festival). Fashion model and former boxer Rikiya Kurokowa, speaking hesitant English and occasionally looking stiff and awkward in his first film role, lacks the authority of the far more assured and internationally experienced Masatoshe Nagase in *Autumn Moon*, and his characterisation is sketchy and underdeveloped, as the use of a generic acronym for his character's name suggests. The sex scene which occurs between JM and BG, while introducing the latter to a degree of tenderness she has not encountered in her previous rough and violent treatment by men (including her grandfather), involves a rather problematic feminisation of JM. In a study of 'the sacrificial Asian' in Australian films, Olivia Khoo compares *The Goddess of 1967* with Sue Brooks' 2003 film *Japanese Story*, where the Australian character Sandy rather ludicrously puts on her Japanese guest Hiro's trousers in order to assume the male role in their lovemaking. Law's film, she argues, involves a similar 'feminisation of the Asian man' which has been a recurrent tendency in Australian films since Peter Weir's *The Year of Living Dangerously* (1982):

> Again, the sex scene between the two characters is rendered as a site of 'connection', with Byrne 'on top'. Cross-cultural exchange and understanding is made to be heterosexually resolvable, but only through a reconfiguration of gender relations applied to a hierarchy of race.[30]

Nonetheless, JM's character, unlike Hiro in *Japanese Story*, is not 'sacrificed', and has slightly more psychological substance and depth than the clichéd, stereotyped and self-conscious cross-cultural Japanese-Australian Outback encounter of the over-praised, multi-award-winning 2003 film *Japanese Story*. *The Goddess of 1967*, although similar in its basic narrative structure on a journey across the Outback, reaches far beyond the narrow narrative and character confines of *Japanese Story*, which, as Mike Walsh has indicated, is 'unfortunately limited to checking off national and racial stereotypes (Japanese men are gruff, Japanese women are inscrutable, and there is so much space in Australia)'.[31] JM's character functions as a catalyst in extending BG's awareness of her world, teaching her to trust people and stop protecting herself with a gun, and also offering her a relationship based on mutual understanding. In exchange, she offers him lessons in Outback survival, teaching him to trust his senses as opposed to being dependent on technology. This also involves listening to sounds – as in a sequence in which BG encourages JM to listen to the insects dying on the windscreen of the car, which we later see him cleaning.

Law's unfamiliarity with the film's Outback setting tends to lead to a visual fascination with the surfaces and textures of the landscape which is often

showcased at the expense of narrative consistency and function or character development. That said, largely driven as it is by Dion Beebe's visually spectacular cinematography, the film is much more formally experimental and adventurous than *Floating Life*, displaying a desire to take risks and break with narrative conventions in a way which makes demands on the spectator, and the use of Celtic-influenced music by Jen Anderson often embodies this break with narrative convention. But the film's ultimate narrative resolution is nonetheless conventional to the point of cliché. There is also a superficiality about a number of sequences, such as the pixilated shots of Tokyo, which JM describes as being 'like Mars', while Law has suggested rather disingenuously that 'Just showing Tokyo in a film, for example, can make a very succinct point about post-modernism. The wealth and materialism, the sense of isolation, the coolness and beauty of surfaces. It communicates all that very clearly'.[32] But lest her remarks on post-modernism be read in a positive light, it is important to note that Law has also indicated that 'for me the postmodern existence is cold and inhuman and incomplete, because we are probably very fulfilled in our material need but we are very cut off from the spiritual side and the emotional side in us'.[33] This would appear to restrict any postmodern readings of the film's narrative and formal structure, which is rather an embodiment of the need for spiritual and emotional grounding and connection which is a recurring theme in all Law's films, although *The Goddess of 1967* tends to approach these themes through blunt and simplistic characterisation, narrative and dialogue.

The melange of pre-title sequences of *The Goddess of 1967* mobilises a wide range of music as an index to character, situation and mood, as it chronicles JM's email communications with Australia in quest of a Citroën DS. He first appears on a bullet train in a tunnel, then we see him at various moments in his apartment preparing to feed his collection of snakes with white mice, and a heavy rock riff is succeeded by a classical piano sonata, some flamenco guitar, a jazz orchestra, Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, some 1960s pop music, frenetic accordion music, a violin sonata and finally, after he has agreed to pay $35,000 cash for the car, and announces he is going away on holiday, some hip hop, as he dances around his apartment in snorkel and flippers. We later learn from JM that if his snakes are unhappy, listening to Wagner's *Flying Dutchman* will help them, but this use of snippets from contrasting musical genres also establishes the passing of time and mood, as well as the somewhat frenetic nature of JM's commodity fetishism, and the centrality of music and dancing in the film. As Villella has indicated, this opening sequence illustrates Law's skill in manipulating *mise-en-scène*: 'not a word is spoken as one set-piece after another, with music as a key identifying factor, reveals important plot details and peculiarities relating to JM's character'.[34] Nonetheless the wide range of music samples used here do not tell us much about JM, who continues to remain a shadowy figure throughout the film.

After the scene shifts to Australia, animal sounds give way to more loud rock music, as the couple selling the car dance in jubilation with their young daughter after having sealed the deal. An expressionistic sequence showing the pink Déesse in motion, accompanied by statistics of its history and manufacture, is then presented to the strains of an ethereal solo violin, as JM arrives in Australia to discover, in a horrific silent sequence, that the would-be vendors are both dead as a result of a murder-suicide, brains and blood are spattered around the house – an event which is never satisfactorily explained – and BG is now his main link to the car. We then return to the Déesse, caressed and fetishised by the camera and the recurring violin music, and accompanied by Barthes' celebrated quote from *Mythologies*, 'It is obvious that the new Citroën has fallen from the sky',[35] which serves to establish the car as a major character in the film. A tearful BG, overawed by the car's beauty, then finally gets to try out the car's famous hydraulic suspension and to test drive it, which he says feels like 'flying'. JM reveals that his fascination for the car dates from having seen it in Jean-Pierre Melville's film *Le Samurai*, with Alain Delon, which as David Stratton points out, was also made in 1967.[36] Although the film is not mentioned by name, it establishes the European arthouse referentiality which the film espouses. It comes as no surprise that an image of the pink Déesse in the Australian Outback was used for publicity for the film in France – a later documentary sequence in *Goddess* recounts how the Déesse gained cult status in France after its hydraulic suspension, which pumps the car up, was credited for rescuing President De Gaulle in 1967 from a barrage of bullets in an assassination attempt. To BG, on the other hand, it has more emotional connotations: it is her (rather unlikely) 'family car' and thus full of rather grisly ghosts from her past which she is attempting to exorcise. So the car becomes, in Villella's words:

> a personalised vessel travelling in an alternate time-space continuum. In the film's swift and clever association of meanings, JM's desire for the ultimate material possession eventually translates into a spiritual and deep connection with BG, whose identity becomes synonymous with the Citroën.[37]

The Citroën's central metaphorical role in the film is rather ponderous. The 5-day car journey the characters take through the Outback, complete with lengthy flashback sequences, accumulates a considerable amount of emotional and spiritual baggage, mostly BG's, along the way, without succeeding in synthesising or resolving it satisfactorily with the present-time narrative. Law has stated that she prefers the term 'journey film' to 'road movie',[38] implying that the narrative 'journey' involved is primarily an interior psychological one, but it is a difficult one for the spectator to endure. The solo violin which recurs on the film's soundtrack offers a kind of sonic signpost, especially in a haunting sequence when BG lies outside next to a

tree in the dark, watched over by a group of dingoes, linking these sequences associatively to the car and the journey, but only sporadically. But the diversity and disparity of the film's music, which is at times excessively forceful in its function as commentary, serves to further fragment an already fragmented film, which lacks the structural cohesion and control of Law's previous work, and the final encounter between BG and her abusive grandfather in an opal mine in Lightning Ridge, where she intends to shoot him but doesn't, lacks any real sense of convincing resolution. Ultimately the characters fail to engage an audience's sympathy, despite strong performances from Rose Byrne and a heavily Irish-accented Nicholas Hope (Grandpa), and too often the film drags inconsequentially, too dependent on the visual appeal of its landscape, inconsequential exchanges between JM and BG, and overly dramatic set pieces like the one in which BG's mother burns down the family home and tries to get BG to die in the fire 'for her sins'. Whereas Law succeeded in defamiliarising the ghost town of Australian suburbia and showing it effectively through her characters' eyes in *Floating Life*, the characters in *The Goddess of 1967* are rather dwarfed and overwhelmed by the film's Outback environment and do not manage to make a comparable impact to the Chan family in Sydney. *The Goddess of 1967* is much less fully realised than its predecessor, partly because it is reaching across to different cultural bases from Law's familiar grounding in Chinese cultural formations. Alice Kavanagh has noted that the film performed well in European markets (it ran for several weeks in Amsterdam), and that '[reviews] varied wildly, often criticising its length, lack of linear narrative, sparse dialogue and emotional distance from its characters, while praising the visual techniques and postmodern sensibilities'.[39] She also notes that the film has continued to generate interest and reference, appeared as part of a touring exhibition of Australian road movies entitled *Burning Rubber* in 2001, and claims that 'Made for a worldwide art cinema circuit rather than a local market it is also an excellent example of the internationalisation of the Australian film industry … a unique and brave vision that extends the definition of Australian cinema'.[40] *The Goddess of 1967* is an adventurous film which is not afraid to take stylistic and thematic risks in its Outback encounters, and its uncertainties in dealing with its more normative Australian aspects no doubt influenced its rather wary reception in Australia; responses elsewhere appear to have been less cautious.

After *The Goddess of 1967*, Law indicated that she was in the process of making another Australian Outback-based film, entitled *The Mechanical Bird*, based on her and Eddie Fong's experiences at White Cliffs.[41] This suggests that *The Goddess of 1967* might be regarded as a transitional film in which she was groping towards the realisation of narratives about non-Chinese Australian characters and situations, which are markedly different from her own grounding in transnational narratives of Chinese diasporic experiences. *The Goddess of 1967* remains nonetheless in many ways a

fascinating and unusual film, exploring themes which might hopefully be achieved more fully in *The Mechanical Bird*.

Letters to Ali: a family's journey to a refugee

Work on *The Mechanical Bird*, was, however, suspended after Law read an article in the Melbourne *Age* newspaper in September 2002 in which a general practitioner living outside Melbourne, Trish Kirbi, described her letters to a 15-year-old Afghan asylum seeker in the Port Hedland detention centre in Western Australia, her attempts to adopt him into her family on a bridging visa – later rejected – and her 15-day visit to the asylum centre by car across the Australian Outback with her husband and four children. In it Kirbi stated:

> The reason I began writing to Ali was that I had a strong feeling our media reports are often biased, if not completely inaccurate. It seemed to me the government, through the press, has kindly guarded the Australian government against any overwhelming empathy, which may make their hearts ache like mine does. The media presents asylum seekers as possible, if not probable, terrorists, which places defence uppermost in the Australian consciousness. Rejection of all things foreign, unknown or different to us becomes a knee-jerk response.[42]

As a recent 'foreign' migrant to Australia, Law also felt empathy with asylum seekers, and as a film maker a desire to expose the government-fostered xenophobia against asylum seekers. This had been revealed by a poll taken in 2001 which found that 77 per cent of the Australian public supported the government's hard line against 400 asylum seekers who were rescued by the Norwegian ship the Tampa, and the success of the Howard government in the 2001 elections on the basis of false evidence circulated by them that a group of asylum seekers had thrown their children overboard from a boat in order to gain sympathy. As Law has noted: 'There was … an urgency and an immediacy to the subject and that was why in the middle of 2003 I simply put down what I was doing, went ahead and shot this essay film with a DV camera and funded it with my husband and myself.'[43] The crew of the film, including the composer Paul Grabowsky, sound designer Livia Ruzic and editor Jill Bilcock, all donated their services, the sound studio and post-production house lent their equipment and support, the Melbourne Film Festival – where the film later received a standing ovation – donated money, Law and Fong were lent a camera and sound recording equipment, and the film was made on next to no budget. It was a film of conscience, a protest against the Howard government's cruel and inhumane policy of mandatory detention for an indefinite period for asylum seekers, including children – Australia is the only Western country with such a policy – and imprisoning them in detention centres with barbed wire fences located in

remote areas of Australia, even charging them for their imprisonment when they are eventually deported, as 75 per cent of them are.

The film's approach to its subject is oblique, beginning with Law's own reflections about her uneasily comfortable life in Australia in a house with more rooms than people, with a front and back garden, and in an environment where there is a great deal of silence. Intertitles are used throughout to express Law's thoughts and to convey factual and narrative information, punctuated by Grabowsky's uncomplicated, atmospheric piano music, in a style which is appropriately epistolary but which also slows the film down, while the use of a camcorder evokes *Autumn Moon*, where the Japanese protagonist records his impressions of Hong Kong in a sometimes similar way. But the focus of *Letters to Ali* gradually settles on the Silberstein family, who are fortunately intriguing enough to sustain an audience's attention, and the film is largely a 'road movie' about Law and Fong's 6,000-kilometre journey with the Silbersteins across the Outback to visit Ali in Western Australia. As such, it has strong affinities with *The Goddess of 1967*, and details of the Outback, including sunsets and desertscapes, as well as the sounds of the birds and fauna of the Outback, are dwelt on, in a series of Ozu-like 'pillow shots' which construct an Australian landscape on which Ali's suffering is inscribed. Trish's husband Rob Silberstein, a Polish émigré to Australia whose father was a Holocaust survivor, and who experienced the Australian migrant camp at Bonegilla, draws parallels between Australian detention centres and German concentration camps such as Dachau, which the Silberstein family have visited, basing these comparisons on direct experience of both rather than political rhetoric. In a telling moment, Trish describes how as a child she loved to sing the Australian national anthem 'Advance Australia Fair', but now feels ill when she hears the lines 'for those who come across the sea'. Australia is, as she points out, a 'vast country with very few people', and one of the purposes of the journey across the Outback is to demonstrate this, as well as turning the film into what Sandra Hall has described as a 'meditation on Australia' from Law's perspective as a migrant from Hong Kong.[44]

One central expedient of the film, which becomes notably symbolic, is that Ali's face is never shown – even though he had turned 18 by the time the film was released, his lawyer was afraid his application for refugee status would be jeopardised if his identity were revealed. (Ali is of course not his real name.) When the Silberstein family finally see him on temporary release with another family in Adelaide (all filming and photography is prohibited inside detention centres), his face is pixilated in order to conceal his identity. This has the effect of making him into a phantom, emphasising his non-status in Australia, his loss of identity and his reduction to a cipher, out of sight and outside help; he becomes, in Evan Williams' words, 'the universal faceless refugee, without home, country, or identity'[45] in a device which, as Richard Phillips comments, 'further highlight[s] the dehumanising

character of Australia's immigration laws'.[46] It also ironically echoes Trish Kirbi's comment in her *Age* article: 'I was frustrated that the refugees were denied a human face.'[47] Earlier in the film the use of Ali's voice-over was replaced by subtitles summarising his answers to 'homework' questions on subjects such as ancestors, death, the sea, and significantly for Law, home ('a place to feel safe, confident and certain of, beside a chestnut tree'), and despite being central to the film, his position becomes totally marginal, filtered through the perceptions of the Silberstein family, Law and Fong's representation of their journey, and interviewees commenting about government policy. But as Law has commented, this obliteration of Ali becomes a strength: 'People are able to feel his anger, his pain and his anguish much more … You realise more the plight of these people because they don't have a face and they don't have a voice.'[48]

Political perspective on the situation of asylum seekers in Australia is provided by perhaps over-lengthy interviews with Malcolm Fraser, Liberal Party prime minister of Australia from 1975 to 1983, and one of Howard's predecessors who has become a spokesperson on human rights to a degree that contrasts him sharply with Howard. Fraser traces the history of the Australian government's treatment of refugees from the days of the Vietnam War, and cautions against the current government playing on populist xenophobia, and notes that in 2003 there were 200 children being held in detention centres. This number has subsequently been reduced considerably, and razor wire has been removed from detention centres not housing 'criminals', which suggests that the film, or at least the strong public support for asylum seekers that mobilised it, may have had some impact on the Howard government's treatment of refugees. (Law is unable to divulge Ali's current situation, but has indicated that he is still 'in limbo'.) Fraser's ethnic affairs minister from 1979 to 1982, Ian McPhee is also interviewed talking about the White Australia Policy of the 1950s which prohibited non-white immigrants to Australia, along with other 'talking heads' such as Adam Myonvell, a protester who participated in public demonstrations outside detention centres, who provide a broader perspective on Ali's situation. But Law is careful to claim that *Letter to Ali* is not a 'political film', rather a film about '[how] democracy can be easily abused and is nothing if there is no morality guiding it … I'm not talking about morality in a religious sense, but a basic understanding about what is good or bad'.[49] According to Richard Phillips of the *World Socialist Web Site* – who was damning in his review of *The Goddess of 1967* – in an otherwise positive review of *Letters to Ali*, this focus on morality diminishes the film: 'Law … tends to present the issue as a moral, rather than political problem … a … significant weakness is its failure to probe the history and politics of mandatory detention'. But it could be argued that to do this would turn the film into dry political analysis rather than a story-based, character-based documentary which focuses on the human issues of asylum seekers; as Phillips concedes, the film is 'a deeply

personal and at times powerful protest against Australia's reactionary and inhumane immigration policies'.[50]

While there are elements of whimsy in the film, especially in Law's own personal accounts of her life in Australia, her reference to her 'long march' with the Silbersteins across the Outback, and in the highly emotional image that closes the film of a cloud formation after a storm which Law compares to a mother dragon bringing her child home, there is a strongly humane basis to it which engages the spectator and induces strong empathy with the situation of Ali and those like him. The only Australian film to be selected for the Venice and Toronto film festivals in 2004, it is a film which has conclusively identified Law as an Australian rather than a transnational film maker, with a commitment to Australian social and political issues relating to migration and asylum seekers that was arguably not so evident in the portrayal of Chinese migration in *Floating Life* and largely absent from *The Goddess of 1967*. It also represents a new direction in her work, conclusively influenced by her involvement in Australian realities, into the film essay and documentary form. Asked in an interview with Phillips about the recent prevalence and popularity of documentaries such as *Fahrenheit 911*, she enumerated a desire for truth, a dissatisfaction with fiction films, the advance in lightweight filmmaking technology, and an increasing sense of powerlessness among individuals in a corporate world as factors influencing her foray into the genre:

> Maybe [people] believe that there is more truth in [documentaries] than fiction films or that they learn more from them. I'm a fiction filmmaker and used to see a lot of movies but nowadays I don't watch many at all because most of the time I'm dissatisfied. And I don't think that I'm alone. In general fiction films are going backwards. Secondly, technology has advanced so that it is easier to make documentaries. The new lightweight equipment is less intrusive and allows you to establish a more intimate relationship with the subject. Also because of the way the world is run people feel very powerless. Everything is controlled one way or the other, whether you're aware of it or not.[51]

Even if Law continues to make Australian-based fiction films, her experiences in *Letters to Ali* have influenced her career trajectory irrevocably, and grounded her in a much less 'floating' situation over the ten years she has been based in Australia, as well as defining her as an Australian director with a strong support base. Although her current project, *Like a Dream*, a US co-production about a relationship between an American man and a Chinese woman, shot in New York and Shanghai on a relatively high budget with well-known actors, suggests both a new direction and a return to the concerns of films such as *Farewell China*, she has moved a long way both physically and artistically from her previous base in Hong Kong.

Part II

To-ing and fro-ing

Transnational genres

7 Generic ghosts

Remaking the new 'Asian horror film'[1]

Bliss Cua Lim

Ghosts, it appears, are growing ever more generic. This paradox is encapsulated in the Derridean understanding of the ghost as 'repetition *and* first time'.[2] We are faced, on the one hand, with the force of singularity: the singularity of the jolt, of the first time one sees a ghost, or screams at a terrifying turn in a movie. On the other, formulaic repetition: one sees the same ruse again and again. A scream gives way to a chuckle; the horror film fails to horrify, losing the affective charge for which the genre was named. The ghost becomes generic, the very figure of genre. Through singularity and repetition, the ghost figures both the force and depletion of return.

The genre film is cannibalistic: 'implicitly, each new genre film ingests every previous film'.[3] The centrality of intertextual repetition in genre films is particularly pronounced in the cannibalism of a remake, which even more emphatically 'ingests' its precursors.

The names for intertextuality and generic exchange are many: remake, sequel, allusion, and influence retain, to greater or lesser degree, the more pejorative cast of ripoff, steal, and copy. Their shared semantic horizon, of course, is repetition: a repetition faulted both for lack of originality and for imitation found wanting. Repetition draws us inexorably into the local, specific character of Hong Kong cinema as well as to transnational generic exchange in regionalist and globalist perspectives. This essay focuses on a regionalist-globalist moment in the recent transnational history of the repetitive cannibalism of genre: what can only be called Hollywood's Asian remake frenzy in recent years.

One critic calls Hong Kong cinema 'an unabashedly imitative cinema', noting 'its voracious appetite for imitation, most boldly of Hollywood material' in the form of 'remakes, takeoffs, or simply steals of popular American movies'. She observes, alongside this appetite for imitation, a tendency towards exhaustion: 'the Hong Kong film industry is notorious for seizing upon a working formula and then working it to death'.[4] But what such critical commonplaces conceal is the fact that these generic exchanges are not unidirectional. In contradistinction to a vulgar cultural imperialism model which posits a one-way intertextual flow from the United States to its others, rights to *The Eye* (*Jian Gui*; dir. Oxide Pang Chun and Danny Pang, 2002), which

reviewers charged was merely derivative of Hollywood horror, have been bought by Tom Cruise and Paula Wagner for a remake at Paramount. *The Eye* is among several 'original Asian horror films' that American studios see as 'reviving' the 'creatively dead' Hollywood horror film, whose own slasher film sequels have run out of steam. One reporter writes, 'Hollywood's horror industry is running scared. The formulas and franchises have been squeezed dry. And now Hollywood is turning to Asia to restock the cupboard'.[5]

Our current moment is characterised by furious transnational exchange between Hollywood and what has been dubbed the 'Asian horror film' – a new regionalist appellation less inclusive than it sounds, since it consists primarily of Japanese, South Korean, Hong Kong, and Thai horror films. *Variety* quips, **'**In the Hollywood remake kitchen, French is no longer the *cuisine du jour*, Italian has lost some of its flavour, Latin dishes may be starting to tickle taste buds, and Asian fusion is so hot it's smoking'.[6] Another concurs, writing that Hideo Nakata's *Ringu* (1998), Takashi Miike's *The Audition* (1999), and Pang Brothers' *The Eye* all 'confir[m] Asia's position at the vanguard of modern horror cinema'.[7] Since at least 2001, Hollywood has been in the grips of an Asian horror remake frenzy. Witness Dreamworks' remakes of the *Ringu* cycle (*The Ring*, 2002 and *The Ring 2*, 2005), Senator International and Paramount's remake of Takashi Shimizu's *Ju-on* (2000) as *The Grudge* (2004), and Disney-based Pandemonium's remake of Nakata's *Dark Water* (2005), to name only a few.[8] By 2003 at least 18 remakes of films from South Korea, Japan, and Hong Kong were either completed or in the works at various studios: Dream-works, Paramount, Miramax, Warner Brothers, Paramount, United Artists, Fox, Universal, and MGM among them.[9]

Hollywood's current crop of remakes is certainly not confined to Asian horror alone; nor is the current preponderance of horror on studio slates surprising. In 1999, with *The Blair Witch Project* and *The Sixth Sense*, Hollywood horror films turned a profitable corner, away from previously exhausted genre trends (1980s slasher films and their ironic nineties counterparts, e.g., *Scream* [1996]).[10] By 2002, *Variety* was reporting a wave of new and upcoming Hollywood horror releases.[11] In 2003, *Sight and Sound* remarked the popularity of remakes and sequelisations of 1970s Hollywood horror classics. Like 1980s horror films that revisited 1950s movies, remakes like *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (2003), 'a hallmark 1970s horror product cunningly rebranded for a jaded 21st-century audience', testify to what has been called horror cinema's 'regurgitative' impulse, an 'enthusiasm for devouring and regurgitating its own entrails'.[12]

Why horror? Why the remake? What accounts for the new conspicuousness of a genre (horror) and a generic practice (the remake) in transnational generic exchange between Hollywood and regional Asian cinemas? The answers to these questions are generic-economic: first, the 'value proposition' of playing in the 'genre space' of the mid-priced horror film. 'Horror films are often cheap to make, they are not usually star-driven, don't need a

lot of expensive special effects and can be made in a tight locale'.[13] Senator International, one of the companies involved in the *Ju-on* remake, sees itself as playing in the 'genre space' of horror and comedy, a 'robust' clearing in the international film market for moderately priced fare (productions between US$10–$40 million, at a time when production and marketing costs for Hollywood releases average around US$90 million).[14] Second, remakes and sequels are at base financially conservative studio strategies, considered a 'foolproof', inexpensive, alternative form of development, since the screenplay has already been proven market-worthy.[15] As scholars have pointed out, classical Hollywood horror was characterised by sequelisation and in the 1960s sequelisation was part of the conservatism of New Hollywood marketing.[16] Horror film remakes and sequels, then, are truly nothing new. But although remakes have always been with us, the preponderance of Hollywood remakes of commercial Asian fare is a striking new phenomenon. Of course, there have long been horror films produced in Asia. But what I am calling the new Asian horror film refers to the pronounced role of the horror film, among other commercial genre fare, in the convergence of regional, 'pan-Asian' cinema with global Hollywood initiatives from about 2001 to the present.

Part of this story is already the stuff of recent American film-industrial legend. *The New Yorker* describes Roy Lee as the 'remake man' who 'brings Asia to Hollywood'. By 2003, Lee, a Korean-American film producer working in a white-ruled industry, had sold Hollywood studios remake rights to 18 Asian films, including *Ringu* and *Ju-On*. Test market studies for Hollywood films often come too late (after the film has already been financed and completed) and are frequently inaccurate (relying on small, unrepresentative audience samples). In this light, Lee's opportunistic pitch – telling Hollywood executives to regard an Asian movie as 'as a script that someone had taken the trouble to film, and that happened to have been tested and proved as a hit in its own country' – is extremely appealing to studios uncertain about market tastes.[17]

Such generic-economic factors point to the dangers of characterising Hollywood's current spate of Asian horror remakes in exceptionalist terms. Exceptionalist claims regarding the superiority of Asian horror films constitute one pole of journalistic commentary, a counterpart to the opposite claim that such films are nothing but poor Hollywood copies.[18] Rather than touting the singular merits of a particular film cycle, it might be more productive to see this very cyclicality as characteristic of the social life of genres themselves. Christine Gledhill writes, 'The life of a genre is cyclical, coming round again in corkscrew fashion, never quite in the same place. Thus the cultural historian lacks any fixed point from which to survey the generic panorama'.[19]

Gledhill's cyclical notion of genre emphasises decline and reemergence, keying us to return, reinvention, and movement, rather than stasis. Thus the musical, after several decades, might bob its head up again, but not in the

same shape as before. Similarly, the heterogeneous range of screen texts we refer to under the banner of the horror film has undergone, with dizzying speed in the past few decades alone, a series of deaths, returns, and transmutations: as B-film, high concept, indie, slasher, splatter, gore, and ghost film, and most recently, in the guise of Asian spectres furiously retooled by Hollywood studios.

For these reasons, I am sceptical of claims for the exceptionalism and longevity of this instance of transnational generic exchange. Like many other generic tendencies, every cycle is always vulnerable to a quick weary death from market saturation. Rather, I am interested in seeing how the feverish transnational circulation of a generic practice characterised in simultaneously globalist and regionalist terms (Hollywood remaking an Asian genre) challenges us to rethink prevailing paradigms for national cinema and its imbrication with genre scholarship in the discipline of film and media studies. Given that Hong Kong horror movies are increasingly framed via discursive slippage as 'Asian horror films', how do globalist-regionalist remaking and generic exchange force a reconsideration of the truisms of genre studies and national cinema?

This essay argues that any notion of the distinctiveness of national cinema (whether formal, cultural, economic, or historical) must contend with Hollywood's voracious capacity to deracinate such forms of distinction. Historically, Hollywood's deracination of Hong Kong cinema has taken aim at the genre film – first, 'Hong Kong action film style' from the 1990s on; and second, the appropriation of 'pan-Asian' horror cinema in this decade. The recent emergence of a generic practice, the remake, as a vehicle for Hollywood's globalist deracination of Asian genre films points to the recruitment of generic intertextuality for flexible accumulation. Generic repetition and influence are here a function of the speed with which film industries respond to their rivals by mimicking and deracinating their local, cultural, or national signatures on screen. The newly-minted 'Asian horror film' represents the convergence of both regionalist discourses on the 'pan-Asian film' and globalist profiteering of Asian commercial cinema as at once culturally specific and culturally neutral, hence immensely appealing to audiences worldwide. The new regionalist and globalist Asian horror films and their remakes rely on the recent market proximity of Asian films to various national-popular audiences in Asia and the United States. The attempt to unify heterogeneous transnational audiences via a global smash hit attests to the intermeshing of the national-popular with the internationalised Hollywood standard. We see in Hollywood's furious remaking of Asian horror films two moments: a first moment of triumph for local Asian film industries whose inexpensive genre films outdo high dollar Hollywood productions domestically; and a second, bleaker moment, when Hollywood remakes these modes of resistance into global profits, outperforming domestic productions once again by retooling the Asian horror film as a cultural key to the enticing Asian market.

Deracinating genre cinemas: from Hong Kong action to Asian horror film

Gledhill proposes a modal approach to genre that is cross-national by definition:

> The notion of modality, like register in socio-linguistics, defines a specific mode of aesthetic articulation adaptable across a range of genres, across decades, and across national cultures. It provides the genre system with a mechanism of 'double articulation', capable of generating specific and distinctively different generic formulae in particular historical conjectures, while also providing a medium of interchange and overlap between genres … In such permeability lies the flexibility of the system necessary to the forming of a mass-produced 'popular culture' for a broadening society, drawing into public view a diversity of audiences, sometimes dividing but working more generally to unite them, while at the same time facilitating international exchange.[20]

Adopting this modal view of genre, we might conceive of the 'productivity of genre'[21] in terms of the 'international exchange' between national cinemas, domestic and overseas audiences, cult aficionados, film producers, studio distributors, critics, and promoters. If genres 'serve diverse groups diversely', as Rick Altman puts it, then no player on the generic field is a monolith. What we name – as a form of shorthand – audience, Hollywood, producer, and so on, are all variegated cultural actors who do different things with the 'same' genre film. As Altman points out, genres 'have multiple conflicting audiences' and 'Hollywood itself harbours many divergent interests'.[22]

That the international recognition of Hong Kong cinema to and through Hollywood eyes was always genre-driven underscores the cross-national proclivities of genre. 'Hong Kong Cinema' designates a particular industrial base and cultural and historical specificities; this is what we mean when we analyse it under the rubric, however problematic, of a 'national cinema'.[23] Yet from the late 1990s onwards, films that did not originate in the Hong Kong film industry in this particularised sense increasingly brandished a set of cinematic strategies (editing, action choreography, cinematography) formerly identifiable as stylistic signatures of particular Hong Kong action film genres.

In an article first published in 1999, Cindy Wong wrote presciently of the 'sinister globalism' which subtends Hollywood's interest in Hong Kong cinema. 'By taking over Hong Kong', she warned, 'Hollywood ultimately denatures and denies it … Hong Kong films may be different from Hollywood, but as Hollywood analyses what sells in Hong Kong film, it finds that it can appropriate these features and sell them better'. That year and the following, *The Matrix* (1999) and *Charlie's Angels* (2000), two films which

notably did not feature Hong Kong stars or directors, premiered. With the help of two prominent Hong Kong action choreographers, the brothers Yuen Woo-ping and Yuen Cheung-yan, both films arguably found 'what sells in Hong Kong film' and 'sold them better' to audiences the world over, fulfilling Wong's prediction that 'the general audience may see a Hollywood movie with or without knowledge of its Hong Kong connections at all'.[24]

Through *The Matrix*, *Charlie's Angels*, and a host of others in their wake, including the global blockbuster/art film co-production *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), Global Hollywood has invoked, with great success, a deracinated (that is, uprooted, displaced, de-localised) understanding of 'Hong Kong Cinema' as a style, an aesthetic, a mark of polish in certain high concept action films. This makes it possible for 'Hong Kong Cinema' to be in the room, so to speak, in a film starring Cameron Diaz even for an audience unaware of action choreographer Yuen Woo Ping's lineage in Hong Kong martial arts film production nor his status as Hollywood film maker-émigré. (Nonetheless, publicity around both *The Matrix* and *Charlie's Angels* was poised to draw the interest of knowing Hong Kong film buffs as well.) The appropriation of Hong Kong action films to Hollywood productions is not new; nor is it the first time that Chinese martial arts genres are absorbed into American action genres in the service of American stardom.[25]

An unmistakable aspect of this earlier moment of deracination was its generic stamp, its reductive caricature of Hong Kong cinema as 'action film style'. Stephen Teo calls the international misrecognition of Hong Kong cinema as action film the 'supreme irony in the history of Chinese cinema' given that martial arts films were on the wane for domestic Hong Kong audiences at the time of Hollywood's infatuation with the genre in the 1990s.[26] Critical ambivalence towards the *wuxia* or martial arts genre has long structured debates on the 'quality film', first in Mainland China in the late 1920s and early 30s, then in Hong Kong via Shanghai expatriate film makers in the 1930s.[27] The deracination of Hong Kong action cinema was a 'prequel', so to speak, for the current deracination of Hong Kong genre films under the banner of the Asian horror film. Upon hindsight, what is most striking about Hollywood's deracination-and-appropriation of Hong Kong genre cinema (and soon after, of 'Asian' genre cinema) is the speed with which it was accomplished. Not so very long ago, in 1996, *Time* magazine asked: 'Will Hollywood Ever Make a Place for Hong Kong Cinema?', referring to the hesitant overtures of Hong Kong film luminaries John Woo and Jackie Chan to the US film market. At that time, a Hong Kong genre, the action film, was also being touted as Hollywood's much-needed 'shot of adrenaline', echoing more recent rhetoric hailing the new Asian horror film as a tonic for another depleted Hollywood genre.[28]

Hollywood's uptake of Japanese and Korean genre films happened quickly as well. To take the example of South Korean commercial films: in 2001, when Miramax paid $950,000 for remake rights to *My Wife is a Gangster*, trade journalists were still regretting that 'South Korea's movie

miracle' – powerful domestic box office successes that outshone Hollywood summer blockbusters – 'largely remains a secret reserved for its 45 million people'. Says *Variety*, '[T]he irony is that all this success, which mirrors other celluloid renaissances in Thailand and Hong Kong, is little appreciated beyond home turf'.[29] While 'Korea Fever' for popular music, television and film ran strong in the region (especially in South Korea's most lucrative entertainment market, Japan), the window of opportunity to Western audiences appeared narrow, due to a lack of a clearly identifiable generic trend, and Hollywood's limited slots for Asian films:

> With the West able to absorb only a handful of Asian pics every year, Korean cinema still lacks a popular hook in audience's minds. Chinese cinema is martial arts extravaganzas and arty peasant dramas, Wong Kar-wai and Zhang Yimou. But Korean? Even upscale Western audiences would be hard-pressed to name a single director, let alone a popular genre, that identifies Korean cinema.[30]

Hence, for *Variety* in 2001, the 'global breakout' 'eyed' by Korean cinema still seemed to be a question of gaining international legibility through a single signature genre, or via globally-recognised stars and/or directors. As it turns out, the Asian/Korean mark would be not so much a genre as a generic practice – the remake.

Nakata's 1998 *Ringu* is often situated as the progenitor of the Asian horror remake trend, sparking generic repetition across Asian and Hollywood film industries, a regional-international cycle replete with its own conventional iconography: 'girls with long hair hiding their malevolent faces, dotty old ladies, child zombies caked in white – all of which you can expect to see in the Hollywood remakes'. Hollywood's remakes of the two most profitable J-horror cycles – *The Ring* and *Ju-On* – represent a departure from usual Hollywood practices in that the original Japanese directors (Nakata for *Ring 2* and Shimizu for *The Grudge*) signed on to remake their own films.[31]

Writing about a US remake of a French film, one critic has characterised the American remake as motivated by an attempt to erase the foreign film's subtitles. Subtitles are always evidence of 'the process of being transposed, translated, exported', of the labour of repeating and recontextualising a film, of the need to render a foreign utterance in a local tongue. Subtitles also disrupt the seamlessness of sound and image through the obviousness of the need to work at legibility. The remake seeks to efface the sign of cross-cultural negotiation in order to deliver the foreign as already domesticated and familiar.[32] In this light we might understand Hollywood's feverish spate of Asian horror remakes as deracinating acts of cultural appropriation.

Appropriation contrasts starkly with translation. Derrida writes that translation delights in 'idiomatic singularity', 'approaching as closely as possible while refusing at the last moment to threaten or to reduce, to consume or to consummate, leaving the other body intact but not without causing the other

to appear'.[33] Its antipode is appropriation, which transposes to another register the other that it erases. In this sense the remake, construed as an avoidance of subtitles, might be an attempt to circumvent both the idiomaticity of the precursor text as well as the sign of the work of cultural translation.

Intertextuality and capital

Intertextuality – the way in which texts always point to other texts – in this case serves the ends of capital. The ability to seize upon, to trope (whether by allusion, imitation, or transformation) a prior commodity's most marketable signature, and to do it with enough speed to exploit the currency of always-presentist audience demands, must be understood as a form of flexible accumulation. For Yeh Yueh-Yu and Darrell William Davis, flexible accumulation in the Hong Kong film industry means above all the rapid appropriation and containment of a competitor's market innovations. 'Flexible accumulation means that producers have one eye on the competition, ready at all times to borrow elements embraced by audiences.'[34] The flexible accumulation typified by Hong Kong's workshop model accounts for the speed with which the industry is able to respond to and appropriate the strengths of its foreign competitors, thus accelerating the cycle which moves from novelty to exhaustion in generic exchange. Flexible accumulation means that:

> [W]hen a genre or fad proves popular in Hong Kong, it swiftly blazes out of control. This exemplifies a flexible system of production because it depends on a very quick turn around between the popular embrace of a Japanese television drama, for instance, and a Hong Kong reworking of its motifs. The challenge in Hong Kong is to produce a recognisable knockoff or parody before the shelf life of the source has expired.[35]

This attempt to capitalise on the aficionado's knowledge and interest in transnational genre trends before their shelf life has expired is not unique to Hong Kong: as I have tried to show, we see flexible accumulation on a greater scale in Hollywood's deracination of Hong Kong cinema's (once) signature action cinema.

Clearly, several processes are at work in Hollywood's deracination of Asian genre cinemas: on the one hand a signature (a mark of innovation, of originality, of newness or novelty greeted by vigorous, profitable audience demand) is being transformed into a formula (no longer a mark of local, national, or cultural singularity but a mark of deracinated iterability). We see this over and over again in the terrifying speed of Hollywood's own capacity – whether by way of homage, by hiring émigré talent, through distributor pick-ups of foreign films and through the funding of transnational productions – to neutralise national or regional cinemas that have acquired

cult US audiences and have proven able box office adversaries abroad. This is intertextuality as flexible accumulation, in the service of capital and deracination. All of a sudden, Hollywood action blockbusters look just like Hong Kong martial arts flicks and the distinctions between J-horror and Hollywood horror become less acute. This aspect of flexible accumulation, in another film-industrial context (Hong Kong media producers' ability to imitate profitable Japanese products), has been described by Yeh and Davis as the 'softening of contrast'.[36] This softening of contrast, the quickly-accomplished reduction of the distance between generic innovation and generic repetition, is the very sign of intertextuality in the service of late capitalism, literalised by the operation of genre: commodity distinction made iterable, rapidly repackaged and redistributed for market gain before its popularity runs dry. With startling celerity, an infusion of freshness, a break in generic formula, becomes a trend that runs high risks of exhaustion.

The play of globalism and regionalism

The discourse of exceptionalism that underwrites most Hollywood studio rhetoric on the Asian horror remake cycle is caught between two moves, emphasising the cultural specificity of the Asian horror film while imputing a cultural neutrality that guarantees its appeal to global audiences. A Miramax executive explains the Asian remake fever in these terms: 'These stories can work in any culture.'[37] Similarly, an American distributor of Asian horror films states that these films succeed because they boast strong, 'cerebral' writing, and because the 'Asian mythologies' behind these monsters 'are new to us and make the terror feel more rooted, less arbitrary'. This rhetoric is at once exceptionalist, regionalist, and globalist: Asian horror, in this account, is exceptionally well-written, rooted in mythology, and different from all other generic fare. At the same time, it is exceptionally rootless, deracinated, globalist. 'What does it tell us', one reviewer asks, 'that Asians are turning out stories that can be transplanted, that embody a form of postpunk youth culture as meaningful to kids in London and LA, as those in Tokyo and Seoul?'[38]

Naming is never neutral. The recently conspicuous, spectacularly lucrative 'Asian horror film' is not only a film cycle but also a complex generative act of naming, a discursive formation, regionalist and globalist in character, that allows an array of movies to become coherent and marketable in particular ways. Why call the naming of the new Asian horror film regionalist and globalist? The regional rather than national appellation (Asian, rather than simply Korean, Japanese, Hong Kong, or Thai) establishes a horizon of reception for Asian horror across the board for Hollywood studios, producers, distributors, exhibitors, critics, and audiences. Regionalist framing encourages us to downplay the differences between Hideo Nakata and the Pang brothers, directing us instead to make sense of them as

part of the same phenomenon. In effect, to global (read Americanist) audiences, the coinage 'Asian horror film' affords an abstracted measure of cultural distinction. The films are culturally distinguished as Asian; yet their cultural distinction has been blunted by both regionalism and generic familiarity, by all the ways in which these horror films are new yet readily recognisable. This rhetoric betrays a play with cultural/regional identity that, in the same breath, discounts cultural specificity, claiming a universal, culture-neutral appeal.

The regionalist-globalist discourse on Hong Kong genre films like *The Eye* does not stem from US distributors alone. Regionalist rhetoric hawking a commercial Asian cinema to global audiences is articulated by Asian film producers themselves. Made under the mantle of Applause Pictures and Singapore's Raintree Pictures, *The Eye* is an instructive example in this regard. Applause Pictures is one of many Hong Kong companies – Media Asia, Emperor Movie Group (EMG), and Filmko Pictures among them – aiming to fashion a pan-Asian cinema palatable to global, Americanist tastes.[39] Peter Ho-Sun Chan, the Hong Kong director and producer who co-founded Applause Pictures in 1999, articulates the gist of this deracinated battle-plan: 'The people who are portrayed in the movies that strike Americans as very Chinese, such as martial arts films, are not real people … The truth is we are alike. America's way of life has become the world's way of life.'[40]

In an interview, he enjoins Hong Kong to 'take the lead in Asia to organise other industries … to produce an Asian cinema. The trend is towards non-local development'. Chan envisions an 'Asian Cinema' (as opposed to a 'Hong Kong cinema') in which distinguishing between Japanese, Taiwanese, Korean, and Chinese cultural traits would become difficult, if not impossible.[41]

We recall that Peter Chan is among the mini-exodus of Hong Kong film personalities who worked in Hollywood in the 1990s.[42] Many of them have since returned to Hong Kong while maintaining a regionalist/globalist filmmaking purview. These film maker émigrés belong to globalisation's new breed of 'transnational design professionals', 'cultural specialists and intermediaries working in the film, television, music, advertising, fashion, and consumer culture industries' who, though based in different 'quarters' of various 'world cities', exhibit a 'degree of homogenisation in [their] procedures, working practices, and organisational cultures'. Jetting back and forth between Hong Kong and Los Angeles/New York, these mediators of 'intercultural communication'[43] can only work in the global film industry by speaking its lingua franca (English) and mastering and personifying the latter's transnational protocol, which they constantly exhort their local film industry to take up in the interests of staying competitive or becoming more efficient. One senses in their 1990s interviews a kind of euphoria at being newly initiated into these ranks as well as the stresses of having had to prove their mettle in a Hollywood which is far from leaving orientalist prejudices

behind. Once vetted, they remain well aware of gate-keeping at the doors of global cultural regimes but decide this is well worth the cost. In return, they are granted access to better financial compensation, global audiences, positioning in the world's filmmaking capital, and the power to shape global culture as a transnational design professional.

Audiences and transnational generic exchange

Toby Miller writes, 'We live in an international age that by its very formulation decrees that we are also in a national one'.[44] Miller *et al.* characterise 'the paradigmatic nature of the national in an era of global companies' as 'the requirement to reference the local in a form that is obliged to do something with cultural-economic meeting-grounds'.[45] This paradox is internal to Hollywood's hailing of world audiences. The internationalisation of the Asian horror film prompts us to ask: How does the genre film manage to craft 'a version of the "popular" capable of producing recognition for a range of audiences from different classes, localities, and national groupings?'[46] The role of transnational, heterogeneous audience formation here is vital. The globalist genre film, pitched at audiences all over the world, strives to unify the proliferation and differentiation of a genre's variegated users in search of a worldwide hit.

The Eye exemplifies the pan-Asian cinema model, harnessing talent from various countries in the region in order to hail regional audiences. The careers of the film's Thailand and Hong Kong-based directors, Oxide and Danny Pang, are themselves indebted to the renaissance of the Thai film industry in 1997, which allowed the brothers to collaborate on Oxide's directorial debut feature, with Danny editing. Tony Rayns further credits the Pang brothers' Hong Kong-Thai background with their insights into genre innovation: '[A]nyone who has worked in the faltering Hong Kong and Thai film industries in the past decade must have learned to doubt the market potential of by-the-numbers genre film-making'. Casting for *The Eye*, which drew actors from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and Thailand, for a film set in both Hong Kong and Thailand, was calculated to allow 'maximum reach' across regional audiences.[47]

Applause pictures' *Three* (2002), an omnibus horror anthology by three directors, encapsulates the regionalist-globalist aspiration of the new Asian horror film perhaps even more forcefully than *The Eye*. In *Three*, each director's name functions as shorthand for a local cinematic renaissance. Alongside Hong Kong's Peter Chan, the other two directors are Thailand's Nonzee Nimibutr, whose box office successes spearheaded the newfound vigour of the Thai film industry since the late 1990s;[48] and South Korea's Kim Jee-woon, whose horror film *Tale Of Two Sisters* (*Janghwa, Hongryeon*, 2003) performed vigorously in Korea, ousting *The Matrix Reloaded* from first place in the domestic box office in June 2003. *Tale of Two Sisters* is also slated for a Hollywood remake by Dreamworks.[49]

All this underscores the value of looking beyond what Yeh and Davis call 'the blinkered perspective of cross-cultural criticism that deals with cultural flow solely on the East-West or Hong Kong-Hollywood axis'.[50] Faced with the regionalist-globalist character of the new Asian horror film, we are required to look closely at cultural traffic between other coordinates, the way in which call and response in Hong Kong genre cinema of late answers as much to pan-Asian sensibilities as to Hollywood's long shadow.

Films like *The Eye* and *Three* are couched to address a 'pan-Asian film-going culture'. Critics using this term usually refer to Hong Kong, Japan and Korea, but it is clear that regional networks are also extending to Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, the Philippines, and beyond. According to Yeh and Davis: '[W]hat this pattern reveals is the gradual tightening of Asian regional connections, the result of finer, improved feedback networks between entertainment and audiences, producers and their multiple publics.'[51] The perceived collocation and synonymousness of Asian horror films from various nations is precisely the effect cultivated by regionalist co-production, distribution, marketing, and critical and popular audience reception.[52]

I have learned a great deal from Yeh and Davis's analysis of 'the ubiquity of Japanese media' in Hong Kong and their discussion of Hong Kong pan-Asian production companies like Media Asia. Media Asia is cued to what they call, variously, 'a regional, transpacific youth culture', and 'inter-Asian transnational entertainment', a kind of pan-Asian popular culture that encompasses the production and circulation of film and television between nations as well as the heightened cultural competencies of audiences grown familiar with such inter-Asian commodities. What is key in their discussion of pop cultural flows between Japan and Hong Kong, which I would extend to the pan-Asian character of the horror films under discussion, are their notions of 'instantaneity' and 'market proximity' in the consumption of film and television in Asia (in the past few years, for example, journalistic coverage shows that Koreans, Filipinos, Singaporeans and Malaysians alike have all thrilled to the Japanese *Ringu* and *Ju-On* cycles). The term 'market proximity' refers to a close familiarity between one national popular audience and another nation's screen texts. Yeh and Davis suggest that in some cases, the market proximity of regional cultural products might be able to counterbalance Hollywood dominance in domestic Asian film and television markets.[53]

I would argue that Hollywood remakes of Asian horror are premised on the relatively new market proximity of Asian cinemas as a whole. In 2004, *Variety* noted a 'sea change' at that year's Cannes Film Festival. In a reversal of prior years, art films by 'elite auteurs' were the exception, while the 'popular cinemas of East Asia … attract[ed] the most attention on the world stage'.[54] How did this come about? Clearly, many rivers fed this current: the cult love of Asian cinema by overseas audiences; the triumph of Asian auteurist cinema over the past two decades; the mainstream audiences drawn to deracinated, high-dollar Hollywood films made with émigré Asian

talent; and the critical and popular success of foreign language, subtitled global Hollywood productions (*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*). Like Hong Kong action cinema before it, the growing audience for Asian horror films in the United States emerges in part from the mainstreaming of subcultural cult fandom. The example of one New York-based Asian cult fan-turned-festival programmer is instructive: as cult film tastes in Asian horror dovetail with big dollar business, small cinephilic Asian film festivals run by avid fans, early adopters many years ahead of the Hollywood curve, become financially imperilled.[55] The mainstreaming of subcultural spectatorial sensibilities might also be seen as part of the complex dynamic between the various social actors involved in genre-making and unmaking; 'marginal reception' practices become widespread as new genre trends are first 'poached' then, once established, 'raided' in turn.[56]

Within the last 15 years, from the prominence of auterist art cinema from China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan and Korea in the early 1990s to the mainstreaming of cult tastes in Asian genre films (primarily from Hong Kong and Japan) by the end of the decade, Asian cinema has been an increasingly familiar regional presence on the horizon for moviegoers in the United States. The legibility of Asian genre cinema to American audiences today makes the early difficulties encountered by Jackie Chan in his attempts to break into the US market seem dated by contrast,[57] attesting once again to the speed with which the market proximity of Asian cinema in regionalist-globalist terms has been accomplished. In the United States, this market proximity is orchestrated by theatrical, broadcast, and video distribution, film festivals, the mainstreaming of Asian cult cinephilia, as well as promotional discourse and critical acclaim. In this light, transnational generic exchange must be understood not only in intertextual-aesthetic terms of influence, the debt of one genre film to all others, but also in terms of the regional and global legibility of genre cycles, in particular, the perceived interchangeability and synonymousness of a genre film from one industry with that of another (Hong Kong and Korean horror films become collocated with J-horror). If genre films address an ideal spectator, an insider-aficionado whose familiarity is born of long spectatorship in the genre, then transnational generic exchange presupposes a transnational aficionado familiar, not only with the *Carrie* (1976) and *The Exorcist* (1973) but with *Ringu* and *Memento Mori* (1999).

At the same time, I would hesitate to overstate such proximity. Whereas in Asia, various national-popular audiences might have firsthand familiarity with the Asian sources for Hollywood horror remakes, American audiences may not always know that these films are remakes in the first place, since promotional materials for films like Dreamworks' version of *The Ring* are characteristically silent on this score. Even where American audiences may know that they are watching a remake, they may not have seen the Asian 'original' prior to the Hollywood version, in which case the question of firstness in remakes and sequels requires greater nuance.

Here we see that the specific contours of transnational generic exchange undermine the temporality conventionally attributed to sequels and remakes. Sequels and remakes are usually differentiated from other forms of intertextuality via their temporality, which might be dubbed the time of afterwards: the sequel or remake is thought to always follow from a precursor text. Yet this temporality, as with the premise of originality, proves upon closer view to be illusory. The time of 'afterwards' starts to come apart the closer one looks at things, since intertextuality is itself always temporally discrepant.[58] So perhaps remakes and sequels are not only afterward but also a refusal of afterward. What do we make of the spectator who comes to Nakata's 'original' *Ringu* second, having first seen Gore Verbinski's remake *The Ring* (2002)? In this case the remake becomes the ground for the reception of the precursor text, introducing instability into the very terms original, copy, precursor, remake, and sequel; in short, to questions of priority and cultural value in genre studies.

From national cinema to Asian markets

Writing in 1989, Andrew Higson already understood the problems posed by Hollywood to the issue of national cinema. To begin with, any essentialist understanding of national cinema which seeks to define it in terms of an absolute difference from Hollywood films is bound to fail, not least because Hollywood has so profoundly infused what counts as national-popular throughout the world, beating domestically-produced films in their own backyard. To take seriously the question of what national-popular film audiences are actually watching, our notion of national cinema must acknowledge the existence of the Hollywood other within. Thus a model of national cinema that seeks to work contrastively, via a rhetoric of singularity or exceptionalism, runs aground vis-à-vis the suffusive reach of Hollywood. Higson writes:

> Such an operation [the attempt to define a national cinema by contrast to others, as different from the cultural production of other nations] becomes increasingly problematic as cinema develops in an economy characterised by the international ownership and circulation of images and sounds. It is therefore necessary to examine the overdetermination of Hollywood in the international arena. *By Hollywood, I mean the international institutionalization of certain standards and values of cinema, in terms of both audience expectations, professional ideologies and practices and the establishment of infrastructures of production, distribution, exhibition, and marketing, to accommodate, regulate, and reproduce these standards and values* …
>
> Hollywood never functions as simply one term within a system of equally weighted differences. Hollywood is not only the most internationally powerful cinema – it has also, of course, for many years been

> an integral and naturalised part of the national culture, or the popular imagination, of most countries in which cinema is an established entertainment form. In other words, Hollywood has become one of those cultural traditions which feed into the so-called national cinemas of, for instance, the western European nations.[59]
>
> (my emphasis)

Higson's definition of Hollywood as the internationalisation and institutionalisation of filmic standards and values – affecting audiences, film professionals, production, distribution, exhibition, and marketing strategies – has great analytical force. Nonetheless, Higson's discussion of the traffic between Hollywood and national cinemas remains regrettably one-sided. His argument emphasises Hollywood's contributions to national cinema, especially national popular cinema, but he fails to mention the converse: Hollywood's debts to other national cinemas, its founding reliance on émigré talent, its appropriation of aesthetic hallmarks, its practices of borrowing and remaking, and its eye on foreign markets.

How then does global Hollywood – defined not only as a geographically situated film industry, but as the *internationalisation* of filmic standards, values, professional ideologies, industrial practices, marketing strategies, and audience expectations – prompt us to nuance our understanding of national cinema? First, as Higson points out, national cinema cannot be defined via absolute difference from Hollywood; second, the economic reality is such that, to survive, national cinemas must play in the key of this juggernaut's standards:

> Part of the problem, of course, is the paradox that for a cinema to be nationally popular it must also be international in scope. That is to say, it must achieve the international (Hollywood) standard. For, by and large, it is the films of the major American distributors which achieve national box-office success, so that film makers who aspire to this same level of box-office popularity must attempt to reproduce the standards, which in practice means colluding with Hollywood's systems of funding, production control, distribution and marketing. Any alternative means of achieving national popular success must, if it is to be economically viable, be conceived on an international scale.[60]

The regionalist-globalist thrust of the new Asian horror film and its uptake in Hollywood underscores Higson's argument that to be national-popular is to be international. Framing the question of transnational generic exchange between 'Asian horror' and Hollywood remakes in light of such vexed questions of national cinema brings several issues into view: first, as I have argued, the limits of a naïve insistence on the exceptionalism of the 'Asian horror film' that claims hard-and-fast distinctions from Hollywood analogues. Second, against Higson's image of Hollywood radiating a

one-way stream of influences to the rest of the world, here we see clearly that Hollywood, too, pillages from its rivals, a conspicuous instance of national-regional counterflows, in which the centre imitates its cinematic elsewheres, lest we forget that film is truly global. Finally, there is the complicated question of what is really being mimicked here: not just genre, but globalised film culture writ large, the internationalisation of film standards, and the imbrication of this internationalisation/standardisation with the national-popular.

Here Higson's observations appear to be borne out, since the new Asian horror films prove to be nationally popular (strong domestic box office able to equal or better Hollywood competitors), and meet the 'international standard', yielding the familiar, globally-recognised pleasures of the 'well-made film' (strong narrative conceits, visual élan, effective set-pieces). Speaking the internationally-legible language of the generic standard with culturally specific flair, such films do well, first nationally, then regionally, then, at the farthest remove, globally, especially in the mouths of their new Hollywood versions.

But the so-called the Asianisation of Hollywood requires us to look further than the national cinema-Hollywood nexus to assess the impact of regionalist-globalist discourses on national cinema markets in an internationalised frame. Studies on the 'Asianisation of Hollywood' and the corollary 'Hollywoodisation of Asia' point to the globalisation of film production and distribution, of cultural labour, and of film markets. Christine Klein puts in this way: 'Hollywood is becoming an export industry, making movies primarily for people who live outside the US.' At present, overseas earnings account for over half of a Hollywood film's revenue. Over the last two decades, Asian film markets in particular have taken centre stage: 'Today, Hollywood movies take about 96 per cent of the box office receipts in Taiwan, about 78 per cent in Thailand, and about 65 per cent in Japan, which has become Hollywood's single most profitable export market.' The Asian film market has been described as 'Hollywood's fastest growing regional market', with Hollywood keen to fully tap the vast audiences of China and India. Klein points out that the remake phenomenon must be seen in the context of the globalisation of labour: '[I]n effect, they [Hollywood studios] are buying the labour of South Korean screenwriters, which is much cheaper than that of American writers.' Yet I would disagree with her assessment that 'far from weakening the South Korean industry by extracting talent from it, the studios are strengthening it by providing it with a new source of revenue'.[61] This is true only in the short run; over the long haul, Hollywood appropriations of Asian filmmaking (whether in terms of talent, of film markets, or of the distribution or co-financing of 'local' productions) are poised to extract revenue from its internationalising of Asian cinemas.

The recent box office triumphs of J-horror (the overwhelmingly cheap and successful *Ring* and *Ju-on* movies come to mind) are a concrete example of how small Asian B-films can outperform, in domestic and/or regional

markets, high-dollar Hollywood products that are exponentially better financed and better marketed by comparison. At least prior to their ingestion by Los Angeles studios, Asia's recent spate of audience-grabbing, low-rent, not-by-Hollywood horror films did seem to confirm the observation that 'the absolute significance of story over cost for audiences goes against classical economics' standard assumptions about the role of price in balancing supply and demand'.[62]

The other half of the story is darker, though. Remakes of Asian commercial films are allowing Hollywood to better penetrate foreign markets with borrowed force, outdoing the originals in their own home markets and beyond. (Nakata's *Ringu* cost US$1.2 million in production and reaped US$6.6 million in Japan. The Verbinski remake, *The Ring*, cost US$40 million and brought in US$8.3 million in Japan in its opening weeks alone. Globally the Japanese *Ringu* reaped US$20 million, its sequel earning twice that amount. Hollywood's remake, meanwhile, is reported to have grossed US$230 million worldwide.)[63]

We see this not only with regards to J-horror. By 2004, *Variety* reports that the Korean horror film's domestic success story closed on a less sure-footed note in the summer of 2004, when Hollywood films dominated the protectionist Korean film market more powerfully than at any time in the prior 22 months. While Hollywood studios are gearing up for global profits on remakes of successful Korean films, Korea is hard pressed to produce new hits of its own. This downturn is attributed to Hollywood competition and generic exhaustion.[64] This sobering reversal recalls Hollywood's appropriation of the Hong Kong action film from the late 1990s onward, which coincided with Hong Kong cinema's losing ground in local and overseas Asian markets, its historical bailiwicks.[65]

The Hollywood appropriation of pan-Asian signatures in the horror genre is particularly unsettling considering that not too long ago it was precisely this kind of regional intertextual borrowing that scholars hailed as a form of resistance to Hollywood, 'a potential breakwater for the powerful onslaught of Hollywood', enabling national cinemas to 'catch their breath in the fight to win back audiences'.[66]

The Asianisation of Hollywood has been touted as an end to Eurocentrism[67] or as financially advantageous to domestic Asian film industries,[68] but in the long run the converse is true. Culture, whether operating as difference or resonance, 'is simultaneously the key to international textual trade and one of its limiting factors',[69] at once enabling and constraining the transnational and cross-cultural lives of commodities. Hollywood's remakes of Asian horror films might be seen as one attempt to forge a cultural key to open the door to Asian markets. In its bid to dominate promising and increasingly important Asian markets, Hollywood embraces cultural chameleonship yet again, this time in generic guise.

8 Copies of copies in Hollywood and Hong Kong cinemas

Rethinking the woman-warrior figures

Kwai-Cheung Lo

Hong Kong action cinema has long created women warriors who fight men as equals. This trait is common to the swordplay film, the kung fu film and the gunplay film which in recent years have attracted cult following all over the world. Hong Kong's women actioner films as such have provided a model for many recent Hollywood blockbusters – for example, *The Matrix* trilogy (1999, 2003), *X-Men* (2000), the *Charlie's Angels* series (2000, 2003), *Kill Bill Vol. 1 and 2* (2003, 2004), *Lara Croft Tomb Raider: the Cradle of Life* (2003), *Elektra* (2005) and *Sin City* (2005) which all feature fighting females doing battle with men on equal footing.[1] The striking similarity might be attributed to the fact that Hong Kong kung fu masters/action choreographers like Yuen Woo Ping, Corey Yuen, Donnie Yen and Dion Lam have had a creative hand in these blockbusters.

In the West, King Hu has often been thought as the first Hong Kong director to cast actresses as women warriors in his martial arts films – for example, Cheng Pei-Pei in *Come Drink with Me* (Shaw Brothers, Hong Kong, 1966), Hsu Feng in *A Touch of Zen, Parts I and II* (International Film, Taiwan, 1971) and Angela Mao Ying in *The Fate of Lee Khan* (Golden Harvest, Hong Kong, 1973). But this history is much longer. Yu So-Chau (Yu Suqiu) was a precursor, having played various women warriors in low-budget Cantonese swordplay films since the late 1940s; her father was Yu Zhanyuan, also Jackie Chan and Sammo Hung's Beijing opera teacher. She was not the first woman warrior on the Chinese screen however, the honour goes to Xuan Jinglin in the silent film *The Nameless Hero* (dir. Zhang Shichuan, Mingxing, 1926). The literary counterpart to reel-life women warriors has an even longer history. In the fictions of the Tang Dynasty (618–907 AD), the most famous is Hong Xian (literally Red Thread) who was a male doctor in 'her' previous life; her present reincarnation as a woman atones a past sin – when a doctor, Hong Xian had committed the crime of medical malpractice.

Contemporaneous to the Cheng Pei-Pei era, or in the 1960s, another paradigm of the female warrior emerged in Hong Kong cinema. These warriors are found in films with contemporary settings, unlike those that feature Yu

So-Chau, Cheng Pei-pei, etc. who appear as swordswomen in period films. The former were a copycat version of the James Bond series or Hollywood's spy movies, but with a twist: the female warriors were the heroines. Such modern-day heroines were also found in both Cantonese and Mandarin cinema. Classic examples from the Cantonese screen include the 'Yellow Oriole' series starring Yu So-Chau,[2] the 'Black Rose' series starring Nan Hong,[3] *Lady Bond* (1966) and other related thrillers starring Chan Po-chu,[4] and *The Lady Killer* (1967) starring Josephine Siao. Their most representative Mandarin counterpart is the Lily Ho character in *The Lady Professional* (1971).

The 1970s then saw the worldwide success of Bruce Lee's martial arts movies. During this period, muscular male stars, whether in Zhang Che's overwhelming masculine (yanggang) films or Lau Kar-Leung's 'authentic kung fu' movies, came to dominate the Hong Kong action film market. In their midst however was the memorable female boxer Angela Mao Ying of *The Tournament* (1974), *Hap Ki Do* (1972) and *Thunderbolt* (1973). In the 1980s female fighters like Michelle Yeoh and Cynthia Rothrock (whose movies probably had the most transnational and trans-racial cast in Hong Kong film history)[5] burst onto the scene, alongside Jackie Chan, Sammo Hung and Yuen Biao. In other words, fighting females in the 1970s and 1980s are spillovers from the excessive masculinity that dominated the Hong Kong martial arts cinema as well as Hollywood.

The construction and representation of women warriors in Hong Kong cinema is therefore a kind of mimesis or resemblance involving a binary structure of East/West, Hong Kong/Hollywood, women/men and past/present. John Woo in an interview has observed that: '[I]t is ironic that Hollywood began to imitate Hong Kong movies in the late 1980s and 1990s because Hong Kong films (to a certain degree) are imitations of Hollywood films, so Hollywood is imitating Hollywood.'[6] The Hollywood movies that imitate Hong Kong films that replicate Hollywood, in Woo's mind, probably refer not only to those directed by Hong Kong filmmakers for Hollywood studios in and since the 1990s but also to those all-American productions from the late 1980s onwards, such as the law-enforcement genre of films starring Steven Seagal, the arena genre starring the Belgian muscleman Jean-Claude Van Damme and video/cartoon fantasies like the *Ninja Turtles* (the series was financed and co-produced by Golden Harvest of Hong Kong) and *Mortal Kombat* series.

Into the new millennium, one sees Hong Kong action cinema recycling Hong Kong-style Hollywood action. When Corey Yuen finished choreographing Drew Barrymore, Cameron Diaz and Lucy Liu in *Charlie's Angels*, he came back to Hong Kong to make his own Charlie's Angels in *So Close* (2002) – a girl action film starring Shu Qi, Vicki Zhao Wei and Karen Mok. (Prior to this, Taiwan released a TV pilot entitled *Asian Charlie's Angels* (2001) starring Hong Kong actresses Christy Chung and Annie Wu.) Meanwhile, Michelle Yeoh has sought to regain her fading fortune as the number

one action heroine by playing the Miss Indiana Jones character in the Orientalist, Hollywood-style, English-language Hong Kong action-adventure *The Touch* (2002), which is set in Tibet. Or else, she sought to reshape herself as a batman-like super-heroine in *Silver Hawk* (2004) which, like *The Touch*, was a commercial flop. At the same time the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* formula has found its way into *The Twin Effects* (2003), a Hong Kong blockbuster starring pop-singer-'Twins' Charlene Choi and Gillian Chung who play Buffy-like vampire-killing cuties, with Donnie Yen choreographing the kick-ass kung fu scenes. The film was a big box-office success but its sequel, *Twin Effects 2* (2004) starring Jaycee Chan, Jackie Chan's son, alongside the original cast, bombed at the box-office.

David Desser succinctly explains the historical interconnection between Hong Kong and Hollywood martial arts movies in the following way:

> [T]he American martial-arts film owes its origins and the majority of its defining characteristics to Hong Kong martial-arts films. It is quite possibly the most derivative genre in Hollywood's history and amounts to nothing less than a virtual stealing, a cultural co-optation, of another country's popular cinematic culture. Of course, the Hong Kong martial arts film did not arise in a cultural vacuum and it owes as many of its characteristics to outside cultural and cinematic influences as to the particularities of Chinese culture and cinema. The Hong Kong martial-arts film certainly derived features and resemblances from the Hollywood western, while in the 1960s it was hugely influenced by Japanese Samurai and gangster films (themselves influenced by American westerns and gangster films).[7]

Desser's insights raise issues about cinematic overlaps that have spawned 'copies of copies' in regards to action films, whether Hong Kong or Hollywood.

But what is a copy? In the age of first mechanical and then virtual reproductions, is it still meaningful to talk about copies which presuppose the existence of an original? When we deal with the so-called 'origins' of female fighter movies, are we reinforcing the Christian creation myth of the first woman, Eve, who is taken from Adam's rib in *Genesis*? Can a copy be really traced back to an origin? In Plato's philosophical tradition, a copy is bad because it is a derived, secondary thing, therefore not real. The representation of a woman warrior would be regarded as very 'bad' because, according to Plato's logic, not only it is an imitation of the 'idea' (*eidos*) of the warrior, but also a cinematic depiction that denotes a 'copy of a copy'. Continuing Plato's reasoning, a woman warrior, as a 'copy of a copy', would lead people – especially the female audience – astray since it encourages human beings to pretend or assume the disguise of someone other than who and what they really are. The act of pretending, for Plato, is not merely immoral but the degradation of men to women to animals to inanimate objects suggests a

discriminatory hierarchy. What I would like to add to this classic condemnation of imitation in the Western philosophical tradition is that the majority of actresses who play woman warrior roles in both Hollywood and Hong Kong action cinemas are generally not trained in kung fu, or kung fu experts themselves. In this sense, they are already pretending to be something other than what they are. For those audiences who try to imitate these women warriors, they are in turn simply copying the copies.

Instead of reaffirming the copy–original binarism, sexual duality and cultural hierarchy, I would rather see the representation of the woman warrior as an assemblage of social, cultural, sexual, conventional and ideological codes, which undertakes a multiplicity of becomings. What I mean is that we do not have to give priority to one type of (woman) warrior (from the East or the West) over or against another, or argue that one serves as the ground of the other. Neither would I assert that the representation of these (women) warriors in Hollywood, Hong Kong or Japanese cinema can become in its own way without either reference or relation to any reality. They are the expression and creation of what is not yet present or something other than the actual.

Indeed, the so-called 'actual' being of the cinematic masculinity in martial arts or action films is already an image or a representation. Women warriors that emerge from processes of copying, doubling and simulation are at once actual and virtual images. What the women warriors represent is probably the potential power to become an-other, to (re-)produce masked images of themselves and to not be faithful to themselves. The idea of the so-called original is merely the effect of the copies. In a way, the woman warrior images give access to a virtual reality in the sense that they virtualise masculinity and actualise the imaginary heroine – hard-fighting, weapon-wielding, independent, heroic, cruel and violent rather than merely sensitive, loving and nurturing (maternally) – not necessarily as a kind of reality but as real effects. The virtuality of women warriors liberates conventional gender attributions to a given female subject, and creates some multiple potentialities out of which new perceptions of sexuality can be actualised. On the other hand, women warriors as primarily the products of male fantasy generate the excess of the virtual that sustains the actualisation of onscreen violent masculinity. There is always a reason for male filmmakers to imagine or sexualise women as warriors or as the copies of masculine heroes: the actuality of violent masculinity constitutes itself when a virtual supplement, i.e. the woman warrior, is added. Masculinity is effective only as reflected and contrasted with a similar but antagonistic sexed other. The sexual tension expresses itself in the form of a contest-like evolution: when one sex gains a certain advantage, the other sex is propelled to invent new measures in counteraction. Sexual antagonism engages a self-propelling process in which men imagine masculine women as an imminent threat and to enhance their own virility and power they seek to contain and control the perceived threat.

By adopting a masculine stance or wearing a masculine mask with the necessary accoutrements (such as martial arts skills, weapons, toughness, etc.), women warriors seem to be able to exert power. Yet, there emerges a gap that splits up what a woman immediately is from the function that she performs. The vital force of her being is nothing but a mask or a symbolic mandate she puts on; this attachment to her body, without becoming its organic part, sticks out as an excessive supplement. But this excess is not something that she can easily put on or dispose of. On the contrary, the so-called core dimension that is constitutive of her subjectivity or being is no longer accessible to her because of its excessiveness. It is a common plot element in many warrior women movies that when the female protagonist gains extraordinary power or strength she can no longer be her original self as a daddy's girl, submissive wife or desirable girlfriend for men. Yet commercial flicks emphasise these powerful women as just action babes or bimbos.[8] Although there is a gap between the image of women warriors copied from masculinity and the reality of sexual exploitation and domination, we can read this gap in a subversive sense of tension in which the copy-image is not just a copy but possesses an actual efficiency of its own that sets in motion the process of re-articulation of sexual relations by way of its politicisation. In other words, neither is the copy in itself fully actual nor does it necessarily indicate that there is something beyond the sheer image. Rather, the copy functions as a symbolic fiction that designates the antagonistic dimension of sexual reality or relation in the contemporary world.[9]

As I have said earlier, the woman warrior is an outcome of male fantasies: reduced to a copy of violent masculinity, she cannot remain a copy as such since the masculine mask she wears could disturb her being. Thus, it is not only the 'original' which has been affected or disrupted by the copy. The copy that copies also alienates itself as a result. The original–copy dichotomy, far from bringing about a steady hierarchy, raises the notch for antagonisms. In Stephen Chow's cartoonish *Kung Fu Hustle* (2005) that makes reference to and mockery of *The Matrix* and *Gangs of New York* (2002), the image of the female warrior is re-moulded into an unattractive, middle-aged, dumpy and bullying landlady (played by Yuen Qiu)[10] who is always underdressed – plastic hair curlers, slippers, pajamas and all – and has cigarette dangling from her mouth all the time. Being a female kung fu master with a shrill voice that can splinter concrete and pierce her enemy's entrails, this horrendous landlady, who usually hides her martial arts skills, stands for some fundamental antagonisms of sexual relation (her unending fights with her husband who is also a kung fu master) and of class conflict (her malicious extortions of the poor tenants). Even though she turns out to be a heroine who collaborates with the good guys to fight the most powerful villain and who helps the male protagonist to become a superhero, the aging warrior woman functions not necessarily to complement the male fighters by creating a sense of wholeness that can alleviate antagonism but she also upsets the conventional gender role: she is neither a virtuous motherly

protector or a vicious femme fatale. This construction exposes contradictions within the gender dichotomy, deterring coherent meanings. The theme of imposture in *Kung Fu Hustle* reveals the inconsistency between the image and what it stands for. Not only is the male protagonist an imposter (he pretends to be an Axe-Gang member in order to extract money from the proletariat residents of the Pig Sty Alley), many inhabitants in that neighbourhood are also pretenders of sorts: they variously disguise themselves as innocent folks, this being a cover for their 'real' identity as martial artists or masters. The difference between the image and what it signifies refers to an antagonistic split within one's identity formation. Is it not true that, even in everyday life, we always fail to fully recognise ourselves in our symbolic identities (i.e. the socio-ideological images of ourselves)?

When Zhang Yimou, the internationally-renowned Chinese Fifth-Generation director, follows the formula of Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000),[11] imitates Hong Kong *wuxia* (martial art) movies and appropriates Hollywood computer graphic technology to produce his two stylistic action periods *Hero* (2002) and *House of Flying Daggers* (2004), many Chinese critics have been even more critical of these commercial flicks than of Zhang's previous self-orientalising art films, such as *Judou* (1990) and *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991). The criticisms condemn the movies as bad copies of Hollywood and Hong Kong commercial movies yet there is a common consensus within China's film industry that commercialisation is the only way forward for Chinese cinema, especially now that China has joined the World Trade Organisation. This membership comes with a trade-off: China is henceforth compelled to allow as many as 20 foreign films into its film market annually. Despite this, the Chinese film circle is resistant to the idea of the transformation of Chinese movies from an art-form and tool for promoting political propaganda to a sheer commodity. This contradictory attitude is still common among the Chinese filmmakers: they know that commercialisation is the way for Chinese cinema to go but still they cannot accept it.

Though constitutive of deviations from Zhang's earlier artistic films, in a relative sense, *Hero* and *House of Flying Daggers*, both of which cast Hong Kong talent in addition to that from the PRC and Taiwan, are considered as major paving stones towards extensive commercialisation, competition within the domestic market and the possible globalisation of China's film industry in the new century.[12] These two action films have proved to be significant commercial successes. As mainland China's two most commercially successful Chinese films, and also the two most expensive ones to make, they signal changes in the landscape of Chinese cinematic practices and are able to compete with Hollywood on the domestic front. Both films have a strong swordswoman each. This in part abides by the established tradition of *wuxia* films, and is in part attributable to Zhang's own interest in portraying tough woman, but this woman warrior in Zhang's movies also stands for something – something that is 'in her more than her'. This does

not simply suggest a split between the notion of the woman warrior and its actual realisation. (For instance, it is always said that Zhang Yimou fails to depict an authentic swords[wo]man story as found in the traditional martial art chivalry novel or in Hong Kong *wuxia* cinema. That is to say, he fails to present the essence of the Chinese spirit exemplified in the *wuxia* genre – it being a distinct symbol of Chineseness.) The split is instead more subtle in the sense that it already exists within the notion itself.

Flying Snow (played by Hong Kong actress Maggie Cheung Man Yuk), the woman warrior in *Hero*, is more a swordsman than the swordsmen themselves; she is more heroic than the most legendary heroes in the film. Of all the warriors, she is the most determined to kill the King of Qin (while the male assassins are caught in various kinds of indecision). She is more devoted to her love and passion (she is not afraid of killing her lover) and does not buy into the political idea that the unification of China by Qin will bring peace to the war-torn country (whereas the men are fooled by the unification ideology to the extent that they would stupidly believe that sacrificing their lives for this cause was worthwhile). It is only the female assassin who acts ethically by challenging the myth of unification and who does not give up on her desire for revenge (since the cruel King of Qin has slaughtered her father). Many critics have condemned Zhang for using a *wuxia* genre to promote the ideology of political unification[13] in order to appease the Communist regime. (Mao Zedong had been known to admire the King of Qin, and as such was warm to the idea that the dictator's brutality was a strategic necessity.) The critics of the film ignore the implicit function of the woman warrior: that she would readily give away everything, including her own life and the life of her lover, in order to preserve her desire for revenge. The heroine's 'irrational' insistence makes an ironic contrast to the heroes' sacrifice of themselves for the so-called universal concerns. While all the men have made compromises, it is only the female warrior who is ready to sacrifice everything in order to ethically hold on to the absolute.

If the woman warrior is just a copy of her male counterpart (indeed the entire movie is said to be a copycat version of Hong Kong *wuxia* film or of *Crouching Tiger*'s formula), and if she is destined to play a secondary role because of her particular concerns, it is, however, the image, the surface or the colour (the dazzling embedding of different colours in different narratives leads critics to comment that the film is visually deep but emotionally shallow) that occupies the centre stage and subverts the political substance or ideological content. But the film shrewdly maintains the appearance that the political ideology still dominates and Zhang himself firmly identifies with the official line. It is precisely the close and literal identification with ideological message that can really challenge the power of ideological interpellation, whereas ideology can work most effectively to control the individual when one dis-identifies with it or believes one can keep a rational distance from it.[14]

The total devotion or passion towards a certain ideological cause can

readily be found in the characters of *House of Flying Daggers*. Far more extravagant and sumptuous in terms of style than *Hero*, *House of Flying Daggers* (the original Chinese title literally means 'ambush from ten sides') sets its story in Tang Dynasty when a secret organisation called House of Flying Daggers rises against the corrupt government. A government deputy, Leo (Hong Kong superstar Andy Lau), sends an undercover policeman, Jin (Japanese-Taiwanese star Takashi Kaneshiro), to investigate a young blind dancer named Mei (Zhang Ziyi) in a brothel, believing that she may be the daughter of the late leader of the Flying Daggers. Leo arrests Mei, only to have Jin break her free in a plot to gain her trust and lead the government agent to the secret organisation. But the plot is far more complicated than it seems. Leo is actually a secret agent working for the Flying Daggers and also a lover of Mei who is neither blind nor the leader's daughter but a Flying Daggers member. The rescue mission of Mei is a double-cross plotted by the Flying Daggers to conspire against the government (which in actuality does not make any sense). However, Leo grows very jealous as Mei really is falling in love with Jin to whom she is assigned to fake her passions. Every character is engaged in different levels of deceit, and intertwined with trust and betrayal. Instead of the final showdown between government forces and the House of Flying Daggers (a scene which is missing in the movie), we have the ravishing life-and-death battle of this ménage à trios – a battle that appears to begin in the autumn, with all trees showing their glorious colours, but ends with snowy weather under which everything is covered in white. This Chinese costume-movie bizarrely ends with a closing English-language opera song performed by the African-American soprano Kathleen Battle that not only provides the audience with a strong sense of melodramatic sentimentality but also manifests a kind of tacky East-meets-West kitsch.

It is easy to dismiss that the plot is of no significance and realism is of no relevancy while only the visual images and the digitalised action sequences count. Suffice it to say that Zhang's two *wuxia* films are simply repeating what Hong Kong action movies have been doing so fast and so cheap before but he does manage to refine the tropes into a streamlined spectacle for the upscale global markets. For a few decades, martial arts was the vital adolescence of Hong Kong cinema which has attracted the Hollywood gaze. But when *Kung Fu Hustle*'s female warrior inevitably grows old, even the latest computer technology cannot help her look youthful again. It is Zhang's *wuxia* films that show how the same vitality can be reignited and can serve a more thoughtful and elegant mainland Chinese grace. Apparently paying tribute to King Hu's classic *A Touch of Zen*, *House of Flying Daggers* intends to outrun *Crouching Tiger* by staging a similar fight scene in a bamboo forest using more cutting-edge special effects. With the success of Zhang in copying Hong Kong *wuxia* genre and using Hollywood technology, it is now Hollywood's biggest movie studios that are turning to scramble onto the mainland and plan to turn China into a major film production base, and to produce and invest in movies with a Chinese theme or

Chinese-language films that can later be exported to the rest of the world.[15] Who would imagine that a new global cinema would be in Chinese?

If Zhang Ziyi has been sidelined in *Hero* to only play a minor part, she is in the spotlight once again in *House of Flying Daggers* in which her character reiterates her role of the femme fatale in *Crouching Tiger*[16] as she becomes the very object-cause of desire for everyone. Clearly it is Mei, this mysterious character, setting in motion the entire movie: the government follows her to find the rebel's base while the rebels use her as bait to a set trap for the official force. She is a pure semblance of the mystery or secret to lure audiences and to drive them to follow the narration. In short, she embodies the constitutive lack (of content) in the film. On the other hand, she is also the elusive object of love and lust for the two male protagonists, materialising the void of their desire: both Jin, a government deputy pretending to be the rebel's sympathiser, and Leo, a spy for the rebels having infiltrated into the government body, find her emotionally inaccessible and, at the end, impossible to possess.

Casting Zhang Ziyi as a seductive woman warrior in *House of Flying Daggers* for Zhang Yimou means more than duplicating *Crouching Tiger*'s commercial success and Oscar fame (indeed he is the one who first discovered her in his *The Road Home* [1999]). Probably the investors and the filmmaker aim at what is 'in her more than her', at the unattainable something. The rapid rise to stardom of this Beijing girl, of course, connotes a certain image of the emerging China in the world (her diligence, her versatility, her ability to fascinate the Western gaze, her luck to work with the top people in the field, but also her ignorance of the West, etc.). But the ideological effects of unifying a given field and constituting a new identity can occur only when a reversal takes place. That is to say, the vision of a rising China or of a new global cinema made in Chinese achieves itself by identifying with this woman warrior, this object-cause of desire. What is 'in her more than her' refers to an unattainable something that supports a unity and identity of a certain ideological meaning through which China envisions its future rise, Hollywood believes it can capture the huge Chinese market and the Hong Kong film industry fantasises that it is able to make the most of it by mediating in between. Hence, it is by no means a digression within the context of the Hong Kong–Hollywood connection to discuss how mainland Chinese cinema appropriates the woman warrior figure. Both Hollywood with its capital and the Hong Kong film industry with its expertise in making martial arts films see China as their future, while Chinese cinema needs to imitate or reproduce Hong Kong-styled features on a Hollywood scale as a strategy for survival and advancement. The female warrior qua a signifier precisely serves as the convergence of these various desires and fantasies.

In the wake of the ostensible global triumph of capitalism, the popular representation of the woman warrior in Hollywood via Hong Kong cinema and now in short circuit back to mainland Chinese mainstream commercial film industry does not necessarily denote the rise of female consciousness or

social status (for instance, women are becoming major social, economic and political players in society, thus action films with women as heroines also become more popular), nor is it necessarily an outcome of genre development (such as it is the variorum nature of popular entertainment, when the male action genre is going strong, filmmakers will explore the possibility of a tough woman warrior). Rather, it is the radical contingency of finding a pure signifier under the capricious forces of capitalism that such a signifier can be read as something that keeps reinventing itself to coincide with the ongoing transformations of the worldwide consumer market.

Therefore, the woman warrior genre is not an attempt to naturalise or conceal the sexual competition or even sexual oppression in a patriarchal society by transporting it to a fantastic or imaginary world where sexual equality rules and women can even outplay men both physically and intellectually. In the era of reflexive modernity, the traditional ideological critique may no longer work. Savvy audiences are unlikely to expect to encounter those onscreen women fighters, who are usually depicted as very 'feminine' and 'sexy' in appearance but can kick high and severely beat up men using their combat skills, in the reality of everyday life. In other words, people do not see those actresses as women warriors because they are women warriors in themselves; they are 'women warriors' only because and as long as viewers see them as such, as a signifier without the signified. The Uma Thurman character, Beatrix Kiddo, in *Kill Bill Vol. 1 and 2* kills but without any sensible reason: she does so simply because she is supposed to be able to kill all the villains – the 88 fighters, including the Lucy Liu character whom she decapitates. Anyway, somebody has to win in a combat, as far as the martial arts genre is concerned, and it just so happens that Beatrix is the heroine.

So, pointing out the gap between the appearance of women warriors and the social reality of women is by no means a valid or meaningful ideological critique. The viewers see these women warriors, both in the East and the West, as 'erotic-objects to-be-looked-at' (because they usually wear sexy clothing, sometimes even showing their cleavage, and are conventionally attractive to heterosexual men) from voyeuristic, fetishistic and/or narcissistic perspective(s),[17] and are pretty conscious that these women warriors are the products of artificial, imaginary and contrived representations, without any psychological depth. Women warriors are definitely 'constructs' rather than 'natural givens' to their spectators or fans. So it may be too facile to condemn the fact that the imaginary powerful and intelligent female warriors are merely a cover-up or masquerade for the dumb, weak and sexually-exploited women of real life. Neither can we allege that these women warriors are 'feminist' in the sense that they are always in charge of the situation and enjoy their sense of superiority and authority over men.

Nevertheless, the cinematic images of women warriors may not be simply illusions or a false representation since they do not conceal a different actuality or reality. Rather, the appearance of women warriors in the Hollywood

and Hong Kong cinemas, as well as the new global Chinese cinema, may not be mere appearance but a sort of 'magic' appearance. Even though the onscreen woman warrior is not in herself actual, she could possess some actual efficiency of her own in the sense that her image may give rise to the process of social change and sexual re-articulation. On the other hand, woman warrior movies may only tell us, and the viewers already know it, in the cruel, cutthroat reality of the capitalist economy, that 'don't think you're a woman then you won't be beaten up hard' and/or 'don't think she's a woman (i.e. a presumably weaker sex) then you can defeat her easily'. The woman warrior representation probably reveals the opposite message: that is to say, 'Don't think gender identity counts any more'. Gender identity, indeed, in today's global capitalist system, does not matter and is not a determining factor at all. Under the severe competition of global capitalism that penetrates all humans and turns every subject into a 'fighter' (for survival) in one way or the other, 'femininity' in those women warrior films now becomes a construct rather than some essential, natural and inborn trait of a biological woman. The physique of onscreen women warriors not only demonstrates their ability to beat up and kill enemies of either sex, they are also there to reaffirm the traditional, pre-modern notion of femininity that requires them to be sexually desirable and to exhibit a certain emotional vulnerability in order to mask the emptiness/void of the postmodern subject. We are all reduced to the standardised and levelled-out subject. The representation of women warriors is only used to fill out the void and to articulate the artificial, contrived difference. The female sexy/sexed body stands for one of the last limits or barriers for the friction-free capital not to relentlessly roll over. Perhaps the woman warrior film is not about the concealment of (sexual) exploitation and struggle, but about their inevitability in the capitalist world.

9 The Noir East

Hong Kong filmmakers' transmutation of a Hollywood genre?

Joelle Collier[1]

For many years, the Handover served as the focal point for nearly all analysis of Hong Kong cinema. Between the time of the Joint Declaration in 1984, when Hong Kong's return to China was announced, and 1997, when it was realised, Hong Kong films were inevitably seen as reflecting the welter of feelings of the Hong Kong people towards the momentous change before them. The sensibility that predominated in mainstream Hong Kong cinema was High Romanticism: its 'outlaw heroes', whether Tsui Hark's swordsmen or John Woo's triads, could easily claim Franz and Karl in Schiller's *Die Räuber* as spiritual brothers. Many films were infused with an idealisation of traditional Chinese culture and values (*Chinese Ghost Story* and *Swordsmen* series), and pride in the aspirations – if not the reality – of early modern Chinese history (*Peking Opera Blues*, the *Project A* films, *Once Upon a Time in China I, II* and *III*). As time went on, this sensibility began to be superseded by a 'lesser' Romanticism of sentimentality and nostalgia,[2] best represented by the films of UFO (United Filmmakers Organization), the *mou lei tau* [nonsense] films of Stephen Chiao, and the tear-jerker hit, *Cest la Vie, Mon Cherie*. These films, whether wistfully or hilariously, celebrated the local Hong Kong culture, and, by extension, mourned its impending loss. But as the time of the Handover drew closer, there was a marked shift in tone. Now the Hong Kong film turned anti-romantic, anti-heroic, cynical and even despairing. This new attitude was expressed in various ways, from the deliberate de-mythologising of *Once Upon a Time in a Triad Society* to the sardonic fatalism of *Too Many Ways to Be No. 1* to the trope of youthful deaths in *Made in Hong Kong*. But perhaps the most interesting manifestation was the appearance in Hong Kong cinema of a heretofore quintessentially American genre: *film noir*. Between 1997 and 1998, in that literally pivotal moment in Hong Kong's history, there appeared several works by Hong Kong filmmakers which clearly draw upon the conventions, iconography, and most importantly the mood of the American genre. Of course, there is nothing new in Hong Kong filmmakers looking towards Hollywood for inspiration. Hong Kong filmmakers have never shied away from borrowing/copying/stealing from American films and film trends – just as Hollywood has never shied away from borrowing/copying/stealing from any and all other cinematic communities, including that of Hong Kong. However, the

appearance of this genre in Hong Kong is not simply a case of Hong Kong filmmakers imitating a successful Hollywood trend. (For one thing, *film noir* was not particularly 'hot' at the time in American cinema.) No, the Hong Kong filmmakers were drawn to the genre for other than commercial reasons. While they have shown themselves well-versed in the American films that comprise the genre – as well-versed as the French New Wave filmmakers before them – they did not copy; they appropriated and elaborated. The Hong Kong filmmakers reconfigured the genre so as to reflect the anxieties of post-modern Asia, not postwar America, thereby transmuting the *film noir* into something new: the Noir East. In this essay I will examine three prime examples of this new genre, *Intruder*, *The Longest Nite*, and *Sleepless Town*, noting the ways in which they deviate from the original generic paradigm, and exploring the implications of those deviations.

Film noir: a refresher

To begin with, a review of the genre is in order. In *film noir*, there are numerous plot and character paradigms. Best known is that of the private eye such as Sam Spade or Phillip Marlowe (*The Maltese Falcon*, *The Big Sleep*, *Out of the Past*). The story is propelled when the detective is hired by a client to find someone or something. At the heart of his quest lies a mystery which must be solved; but this proves difficult. His various sources, including his own client, tell stories that contradict one another, and frequently these contradictions are not resolved in the end. As journey, his quest is not along a straight path. He is sent up blind alleys and into cul-de-sacs, literally and metaphorically. And along the way, he loses his professional detachment, becoming personally involved in the case, which puts him in peril. Sometimes in the end he dies; always he is in some way wounded, marked by the experience. Then there is the paradigm of the ordinary man who finds himself in a trap that threatens to shatter his entire world (*Woman in the Window*, *Scarlet Street*). While the trap is almost always deliberately set by others, the protagonist is susceptible to the trap because of some failing, some flaw in his character. He is as much seduced as tricked. Once in the trap, he struggles to free himself; but like a fly in the spider's web, everything he does in attempts to extricate himself from his situation only makes it worse, and the trap closes around him ever more inexorably. But there are other types of plot and protagonist. Indeed, in what he called 'The Family Tree of *film noir*', Raymond Durgnat listed ten categories of noir (e.g. 'Crime as Social Criticism', 'Hostages to Fortune', 'Psychopaths: Who's to Blame'), each further subdivided numerous times.[3] While many would dispute some of Durgnat's attributions, the range of plot and character possibilities is striking.[4] But for all their differences, there are two elements that are fairly universal to all noirs. First and foremost is a sensibility of fatalism; and second is the character that best epitomises that sensibility, the femme fatale.

The concept of the femme fatale, an irresistible woman who leads men to their destruction, predates *film noir*, of course. In the older narratives, she is a force of Nature, as in the case of the sirens of Greek mythology whose song causes sailors to founder on the rocks. But in her [re]incarnation in the *film noir*, the femme fatale has become a deliberate, wilful creature.[5] She is bewitching, she is alluring; but rather than being an object of sexual desire, she is its subject. She controls her own sexuality – and it is that which makes her so dangerous, so 'unnatural' in terms of the prevailing phallocentric ethos. While she often presents herself as a traditional damsel in distress, a victim who needs protection, she is in fact a manipulator of others and ruthless in achieving her goal, which is, quite simply, power. To reach her objective, she will stop at nothing. She will lie, steal, betray, and even kill. But usually she doesn't have to do any of those things herself because she is so good at getting men to do them for her. In the first narrative paradigm, the femme fatale might be the client who hires the detective, or might be the person the client hires him to find; but she is always the reason he loses his professional detachment and comes into danger. In the second story type, the femme fatale, it goes without saying, is the one who seduces Mr John Q. Average and leads him to his fall.

Whatever the story, the world of noir is a world of corruption. The characters that inhabit this world are all – all! – motivated by greed, lust and fear. All human relations are based on a Darwinian code. Characters see one another as either predator – an enemy to fear, an enemy to eliminate – or prey – someone to be exploited for advantage, someone to devour. There is no such thing as loyalty or friendship, only constantly shifting temporary alliances. It is a winner-take-all situation: for one to win completely, everyone else must lose completely. Such normally positive moral values as honour, love, compassion are either completely absent in the denizens that inhabit this world; or are fatal flaws for the few who possess them. Humankind cannot be divided into good and evil, only into the bad, the worse, and the worst. Cynicism and irony pervade the world of noir.

But while this world is corrupt, it is not straightforward in its corruption. It is murky, devious, full of uncertainties and contradictions. Like an iceberg, only a small portion of the whole can be seen; the rest – the most dangerous part – remains hidden below the surface. The protagonist (and the spectator) cannot trust others, cannot trust appearances, cannot trust his or her own perceptions – which is to say, one cannot even trust one's self. All this uncertainty in the noir world leads to another characteristic of the plots of whatever type: they are incredibly complicated, convoluted even, full of twists and turns. Instead of the transparency and redundancy that characterise the usual classical Hollywood narrative, noir stories are opaque, impenetrable. Narrational strategies are based on information that is incomplete, delayed, withheld – or, simply misinformation.

Films noirs are not just metaphorically dark, in their theme and mood and characters; they are literally dark. The characteristics of corruption and

uncertainty extend to the films' iconography and visual style. The noir world is urban and nocturnal: the cityscape is filled with streets that are either too dark to see, or overbright, bleached out by garish artificial lights and neon signs, producing a sensory overload. Shots reveal rain-slick pavement, glass and steel, hard and glittery and unyielding – all surfaces that multiply images, making it difficult for the spectator to distinguish an object from its reflection, the real thing from the false image. The mirror is a favourite element of mise-en-scène because it too can create visual confusion while simultaneously functioning symbolically. A shot which presents the femme fatale looking into a mirror – better yet, one of those multiple mirrors that old dressing tables had – signals her duplicity while simultaneously conveying her vanity, her self-absorption. An extension of mirror imagery, *film noir* often deploys the device of the *doppelgänger* – the evil twin, the double – not surprisingly, since many of the film workers who specialised in *film noir* were German émigrés.

The lighting style in *film noir* is primarily low key, rich in chiaroscuro. The patches and pools of light which shade into murky shadows function to conceal rather than reveal. Although classic three-point lighting is used on the femme fatale to enhance her beauty – at least, until her true nature is revealed – the other characters are often lit in unflattering ways. A direct frontal light might be used, to flatten and wash out the face. Or the lights might be set at odd angles so that characters' features are distorted. The wide angle lens is often used in close-ups for the same reason. The camera, too, is set at odd angles, creating radically high or low angle shots, or oblique ones, presenting a world out of kilter. For the same reason, the mise-en-scène contains few stable horizontals and verticals, but is instead dominated by diagonals, slashing through the visual field. Shot composition emphasises entrapment, through the use of internal frames – doors, windows, and again mirrors – or by just being too tight. (The appropriately named choker CU that crops the face at chin and forehead is a mainstay of *film noir*.) Characters have little freedom of movement in the shot, just as the plot allows them little freedom of action, or free will. The sense of claustrophobia is also conveyed by the sheer weight of things in the visual field – furniture, decor, props. Shots tend to be cluttered, busy, overloaded. While the editing in *film noir* basically follows the rules of continuity, there are certain deviations. In inter-scene editing, establishing shots are frequently omitted, thereby creating momentary confusion for the spectator. And within a scene, shots of radically different angles, or tonalities, or field sizes, might be cut together, creating a jarring impression. As to mobility, the camera in a *film noir* doesn't so much move as it goes on the prowl. All of these combine to create the strongest visual atmosphere in all of Hollywood cinema. In this genre, the cinematographer can often be said to be the real auteur.[6]

Noir East films

How do Hong Kong filmmakers make use of the rich panoply of *film noir* possibilities? Following are brief synopses of the three films chosen for examination. However, in keeping with noir storytelling practices, certain details will be withheld until the end of this essay.

Intruder was written and directed by Tsang Kan-cheong. (The transliteration of the Cantonese title is *Hung Po Kai*, which translates literally as *Horror Chicken*, 'chicken' being a common slang term in Cantonese for a prostitute.)[7] Yieh Siu-yan, apparently a prostitute newly arrived in Shenzhen, has been offered shelter by another prostitute, Sichan Aieh. After learning that the latter is married to a Hong Konger who has arranged for her to come to Hong Kong, Siu-yan suddenly attacks and murders her. With the dead woman's papers and disguised to look like her, Siu-yan crosses the border at Lo Wu. Once in Hong Kong, she immediately applies for a provisional identity card in the dead woman's name. Then she begins to search for another victim, this time male. As a street walker, she is picked up by a taxi driver, Chen Chi-min. He takes her to his secluded house in the Wu Kau Tang section of Tai Po (in the New Territories) for the paid sex. Some nights later, Chi-min is deliberately run over by a car, driven (it is revealed to the spectator but not the characters) by Siu-yan. When next seen, he is back at home, in a wheel chair due to his injuries. Siu-yan arrives at his door, offering him her sexual services again. But once inside, she beats him and then binds him. After searching his house for personal documents, she begins to interrogate him about the minute details of his life. It is clear that this information is crucial to some plan. During the next two days, while awaiting the arrival of her apparent accomplice (an unidentified man from whom she hears by phone), Siu-yan kills Chi-min's dogs, then his mother who had come to check on her son, and attempts to kill the man's young daughter Yinyin. But learning that the child suffers from a severe heart condition seems to the sap Siu-yan's will; so she imprisons her instead. Unaware of this, Chi-min begs Siu-yan to spare his daughter. This prompts Siu-yan to explain herself. She and her husband are wanted by Public Security (Mainland China's police force) for killing their landlord and his family after he attempted to rape her. She has taken Chi-min prisoner in order to achieve their goal of staying in the SAR without fear of discovery and repatriation. Chi-min points out to her that even if her husband has all his (Chi-Min's) documents, he won't be able to successfully pose as him. Siu-yan tells him she is aware of that, implying that there is more to the plan. In the meantime, Sichan Aieh's husband has been looking for her since her failure to arrive in Hong Kong. Waiting at the immigration office, he spots Siu-yan, who still resembles Sichan Aieh, and follows her back to Tai Po. As the two struggle, Kwan-fai, Siu-yan's husband/accomplice, arrives and kills the man. Discovering that Yinyin has escaped, they search for her. Finding her hiding in a rocky crevice near the stream that runs by the house, Kwan-fai walls her

in with rocks leaving her to die. Afterward, they kill Chi-min and use his papers to apply for an id card for Kwan-fai. When they arrive back at the Wu Kau Tang house, they believe they have succeeded: they need only wait the two weeks for the application to be processed. But as they are walking over the footbridge, they see Yinyin floating by below them, very much alive. The rising waters, product of the monsoon rains that have been pervasive throughout the film, have washed away the rocks imprisoning her and set her free. Before Kwan-fai can catch up with her, the child is rescued by workmen and the couple's plan is thwarted. They take to the road to start the process all over again.

Even from this brief description, it is clear that the plot of the film is duly intricate and that its workings are kept hidden from the audience until the very end. Siu-yan, as spider woman, uses her sexuality to lure Chi-min; and Chi-min, the victim, falls prey to her due to faults in his character – his lust and the misanthropy that causes him to live alone, cut off from his family. The brutal actions of Siu-yan and Kwan-fai are extreme examples of survival of the fittest: they kill without passion, and do so simply to survive. But Siu-yan's one act of compassion leads to their downfall. While admittedly the cinematic style of the film draws upon some conventions associated with the horror or thriller genre[8] rather than noir, all the action unfolds in shadowy, cramped, tightly framed interiors made more claustrophobic and gloomy by the unending rain outside.

The Longest Nite, directed by Patrick Yau, is set in Macao's underworld. (The transliteration of its Cantonese title is *Ngam Fa*, connoting something which blooms or grows hidden from view.) As the film opens, someone is trying to undermine the truce between Mr K and Mr Lung, the heads of two triad factions, after an extended and bloody turf battle. A rumour has been spread that K has put out a contract on Lung, causing hitmen from all over the region to descend upon the city. K charges his trusted lieutenant Sam, who is also a policeman,[9] with preventing the hit and finding out who's behind it, while simultaneously looking out for K's hothead son Mark. Sam uses brutal means to interrogate a triad implicated in spreading the rumour and to 'dissuade' those he believes to be would-be hitmen; but when he is unable to scare off the recently-arrived Tony (noteworthy for the duffle bag he always carries, the ball with which he is always playing, the elaborate tattoo on the base of his shaved head, and his imperturbable manner), Sam has him framed for the murder of a nightclub owner by threatening Maggie, the bargirl witness, until she agrees to identify Tony as the culprit. But in the meantime Sam realises that someone is trying to frame *him*: first a headless corpse is found in his flat, then money is planted in his office. Believing Tony to be involved in the conspiracy, Sam confronts him in his cell. Tony tells him that neither of them controls their own fates, that both are just 'bouncy balls' in someone else's plan. Realising his predicament, Sam decides to flee Macao. But at the ferry pier, there is more 'evidence' of his supposed disloyalty. Mark's body is discovered in the trunk of Sam's car; and Sam is

seen with Tony's duffle bag which turns out to contain K's severed head. Attempting to escape from his police colleagues, Sam runs into the returning Lung who he is forced to kill in self-defence when the triad boss mistakes *him* for the prophesied hitman. With his boss dead and himself the fall guy, Sam tries to regain control over his situation. He tracks down Maggie, forces her to tell what she knows of the plot to frame him, and then kills her. He then lures Tony into a showdown in an abandoned factory, during which one of them is killed. But it is not until the other arrives at the rendezvous point Tony had arranged for his own getaway that the spectator learns which one. Rather than escape, however, he too is killed.

While *Intruder* works to keep the spectator off-balance by withholding information, *The Longest Nite* works in a different way. It is a puzzle, a Chinese box, if you will. The spectator and Sam are given all the pieces, but cannot fit them together until the very end. At first the film seems to be making use of the detective narrative, but it slowly emerges that it is instead an example of the trap narrative. Led to believe that he is in control of the situation, Sam falls victim to the trap set for him; and everything he does to escape it only ensures his fate. After he realises that he has been set up by Tony and Maggie, he tries to escape Macao only to come face to face with Mr Lung. The film cuts away to Tony: he is bouncing a ball. On the last catch, he looks at his watch. He knows, even though sitting in his cell, that the trap has been sprung: Sam has had no choice but to kill Mr Lung whose death he was supposed to prevent. Such a trap is not merely effective; it bespeaks a malevolent creator who takes pleasure in the psychic pain inflicted on the victim. This malevolence is reflected in the film's style. The normally sherbet-coloured palette of Macao is transformed into an expressionist painting through a garish combination of red and chartreuse. Pitiless top-lighting predominates – as if everyone were always under interrogation – casting faces into deep shadows. And the motes of dust that swirl in the harsh shaft of light of the cell where Sam and Tony have their first major confrontation seem to give visual form to the complex

Unlike the other two films which were produced in Hong Kong, *Sleepless Town* is a Japanese production. (The English title is a direct translation of the original Japanese, transliterated as *Fuyajo*.) However, its director and co-scriptwriter Li Chi-ngai, as well as its cinematographer, editor and many of its actors, are Hong Kongers.[10] This is fitting since the story, based on a best-selling novel by Seishu Hase, is set among the Chinese triads residing in Tokyo. Ryu Kenichi (aka Liu Chien-yi) is a half-Japanese, half-Chinese minor operative in the triads. When word spreads that his former partner, Fu-chun, is back in Tokyo, he is called in by Yuan, the head of the Shanghainese faction. Yuan wants revenge against Fu-chun for killing Yuan's second-in-command and he remains unconvinced that Kenichi was not also involved. Therefore, he gives Kenichi an ultimatum: find Fu-chun and deliver him to Yuan, or suffer the consequences himself. Kenichi seeks the advice of Papa Yang, the head of the Taiwanese triads. (Although never

stated, it is implied that Kenichi is Yang's illegitimate son. He is definitely treated as a member of the family by Yang's legitimate children.) Papa Yang sends Kenichi to the head of the Beijing triad faction, Cui-hu, to try to form an alliance against Yuan. In the meantime, Kenichi receives a call from a woman calling herself Sato Natsumi, claiming to be Fu-chun's former lover, who offers to 'sell' him. Over time and against his better judgment, Kenichi falls in love with her, and she appears to reciprocate; but some of her actions remain ambiguous, and he fears she is cutting deals with others behind his back. Nonetheless, he devises a plan meant to eliminate the problem of Fu-chun, free himself from Yuan's threat, and ensure his lover's safety. But when the plan is put into motion, Yuan is unexpectedly assassinated. Kenichi then realises that the Fu-chun situation had been a ruse to mask a power struggle among the triads, that Papa Yang is secretly making a bid to consolidate all power in his own hands by eliminating the other dragon heads. Kenichi further realises that Yang had set him up as the fall guy in this operation. He creates a diversion by killing Mr Ye, the head of the Yokohama faction, and attempts to escape with Natsumi; but they are intercepted by Cui-hu, who offers each of them the chance to live, by killing the other. Natsumi takes the offer and fires her gun at Kenichi. But she has been tricked; the gun has no bullets. She throws herself from the car in an effort to escape, but Kenichi catches up with her and kills her. There follows an epilogue. After some years away, Kenichi has returned to Tokyo to wrest power from Papa Yang.[11]

If *The Longest Nite* is marked by sudden twists and reversals, *Sleepless Town* is filled with enigmas and ambiguities. *The Longest Nite* is noir at its most cynical and ironic; *Sleepless Town* is noir at its most fatalistic and despairing. Unlike *The Longest Nite* and *Intruder*, *Sleepless Town* offers us in Kenichi at least one person with some vestige of humanity. The world of the film is corrupt – divided into the cheaters and the cheated, in Fu-chun's phrase – and the only glimmer of something free from that corruption is in Kenichi's scruples regarding the selling of children's organs. Kenichi sees himself as an outsider because of his ethnic and familial status; but in fact it is his capacity to care, to love, that sets him apart from all the others. We see it in the fears and self-doubts that are expressed by his nightmares. We see it in his attempt to save his nephew during the killing of Yuan. But most of all we see it in his love for Natsumi, even knowing what she is. However hard he may try to pretend to be tough and indifferent, his favourite song (which plays throughout the film) is the ultimate romantic American classic, 'Unforgettable'. In true noir fashion, it is the qualities that make Kenichi human that put him at risk. Even though he now knows full well that Natsumi has deceived him and will no doubt continue to deceive him, he goes through with his plan. If there is one thing Kenichi can resist even less than Natsumi, it is his own fate. He must see it through to the end. The fact that he survives – physically, at any rate – is the result of his killing what he most loves, thus killing off that part of him that makes him vulnerable. What makes him able,

in the epilogue, to come back and seize power from Papa Yang is that, as he says in his voice-over, he has become emotionless – and so now belongs in the noir world.

Sleepless Town makes use of the elements of mise-en-scène and cinematography associated with the genre, but goes beyond the usual noir stylistics to create subtle displacements that objectify the ambiguities and uncertainties of the story. Consider the opening scene: in a shallow focus shot, we see Kenichi in the immediate foreground, the figures behind him blurred beyond recognition. We hear a cop demanding the alien registration card of someone and assume that the voices belong to those blurred figures. But then Kenichi turns and the camera turns with him, revealing that the voices we heard belong to a different set of figures. The film immediately warns the spectator to be on guard, to be careful of assumptions. Then throughout the film, we have several instances of disjunction between image and sound focusing on Natsumi. When Kenichi sends her to pick up some money from Papa Yang, we watch her walking down the street and having her cigarette lit by a passer-by who turns out to be none other than Sun-chun, Yuan's lieutenant. But as we are seeing this, the soundtrack presents Sun-chun's phone call to Kenichi waiting in the car. These two actions cannot be simultaneous even though they are presented cinematically as if they were. Indeed, we see Sun-chun pull out his phone, presumably to place the call we have already heard, as Natsumi walks away. Another example occurs when Kenichi goes to the black computer hacker to investigate Natsumi. When he learns that the Sato Natsumi identity is false, there is an ambiguous cutaway to the femme fatale standing on some street, interacting with unidentified characters. When and where and what this is, we never know. But the most noteworthy example of the film's style is the extended steadicam shot that follows Kenichi through the streets and in and out of various buildings as he prowls the night (he refers to himself as a bat) in the nocturnal urban labyrinth which serves as the film's primary setting.

Noir East versus *film noir*

Despite the fact that the three films described clearly deserve to be categorised as noir, there are discrepancies between these Asian noirs and their American predecessors. Consider the representation of the femme fatale. To begin with, *The Longest Nite* doesn't have one. There is only one significant female character in the entire film, Maggie, and she is presented as the opposite of the femme fatale. Although not unattractive, Maggie's behaviour makes her unappealing, even repulsive. When first seen, she is staggering drunkenly through a Macao nightclub, leading Tony to a table. She then vomits several times, including on Mark, which leads to the clubowner punching her repeatedly in the face. Because of this beating, she spends the next scene with wads of toilet paper protruding from her nostrils. Through all of these early scenes, she whines shrilly and takes frequent swigs from a

bottle of booze. Far from being an irresistibly alluring siren, Maggie is presented as a hapless victim, almost a buffoon. As the plot unfolds, we learn that that image is false; she is, in fact, an accomplice of Tony in the grand scheme to frame Sam. It was Maggie who planted the money in Sam's office. Nevertheless, she is still a cog in the machinery – or to use the film's own imagery, a bouncy ball – set in motion by someone else. She is not the mastermind, she is not in control of her own actions, much less anyone else's, as a true femme fatale would be.

On the other hand, *Intruder*'s Siu-yan appears to be a real spider woman at the beginning of the film. She seeks out her male prey, Chi-Min, using her sexuality to lure him. Yet it is less her actions than her methodical and dispassionate manner that mark her as the femme fatale. Her fish-eye stare during sex unsettles Chi-Min. But she is equally emotionless when killing Sichan Aieh or running over Chi-Min. Siu-yan, then, seems the very archetype of the femme fatale whose utter ruthlessness, wilfulness and coldness is a violation of her gender. But then in the middle of the film, everything changes. After brutally killing Chi-min's mother, Siu-yan suddenly breaks down and starts to sob uncontrollably. She is interrupted by a phone call from her mysterious male contact and we hear him tell her how to proceed. Suddenly we realise that the plan is not hers; like Maggie, she is merely its operative. The man – her husband, Kwan-fai – is in charge. Nothing illustrates this better than when, while Siu-yan is on the mobile phone with her husband, Yinyin calls on Chi-Min's phone. With one phone to each ear, Siu-yan receives detailed instructions from Kwan-Fai regarding what to say, which she parrots word for word. Thus, rather than being the femme fatale of American noir, who reveals herself to be unnatural by asserting her desires over man's, Siu-yan turns out to be a completely obedient, subservient, and loyal wife. In other words, Siu-yan, in her undeniably perverted way, is a most traditional Chinese woman.

Siu-yan's conventional gender status might best be established by comparison with a femme fatale from a classic American noir. While the plot of *Intruder*, with its incapacitated character under threat, might call to mind *Sorry, Wrong Number*, *Rear Window*, or, more recently, *Misery*, it is in a very different film that Siu-yan finds her counterpart. *Leave Her to Heaven* is not only one of the few noirs where the femme fatale is the protagonist, but also one in which her bid for power is exercised within the marriage and family rather than in the criminal underworld. At first glance, the only thing the two female characters might seem to have in common is their unnerving stares. The life of the poor Siu-yan is worlds apart from that of the patrician, privileged Ellen. Yet there are certain parallels in the narratives of the two films. In both, the woman is a cold-blooded killer whose killing is motivated by her obsessive love for her husband. And both films contain innocent children who are marked by infirmity: Yinyin has her heart condition, Danny (the husband's kid brother in *Leave Her to Heaven*) has been crippled by polio. Such parallels help to throw into sharp relief the funda-

mental differences between the two female characters. Whereas Siu-yan kills in order to help her husband, Ellen kills anyone who might compete with her for her husband's affections, anyone who might prevent her from possessing Richard solely and entirely. Ellen, then, is utterly selfish while Siu-yan is (monstrously) selfless. Moreover, Siu-yan kills strangers; but Ellen wreaks destruction within her own and Richard's families. For example, when Ellen believes that the boy will intrude on her life with Richard, she deliberately allows Danny to drown.[12] By contrast, Siu-yan, after all the other murders she has committed, cannot bring herself to kill Yinyin. But why? There is no doubt that in her innocence the child is in marked contrast to Siu-yan's other victims: Sichan Aieh is tainted by prostitution, Chi-Min's mother is an unpleasant shrew, and Chi-min seems to have no admirable qualities – other than his belated concern for his daughter. And there is no doubt that Siu-yan's compassion for the child is related to her disease: it is the sounding of the child's medical beeper that stops Siu-yan from killing her initially, and later causes her to prevent Kwan-fai from killing her when it sounds again. Perhaps this signal of Yinyin's weak heart reminds Siu-yan of her own heartlessness. But the simplest explanation is that she recognises in Yinyin her own potential child, hers and Kwan-fai's, the completion of the family all her efforts have been to sustain. In revealing her maternal instincts, however vestigial, Siu-yan demonstrates how very different she is from her American counterpart. So obsessed is Ellen with having Richard all to herself that she cannot even bear to share him with their own child: she causes herself to miscarry by staging a fall down the stairs. The real spider woman murders her own child; the other cannot murder a child who simply could be her own.

On the other hand, Natsumi of *Sleepless Town* is an undoubted femme fatale. There are many stories told about her and many she tells herself, and the different stories cannot be completely reconciled. Initially she presents herself as a combination client and damsel in distress for the protagonist, á là *The Maltese Falcon*. She says she wants to 'sell' Fu-chun because he abused her and she fears him. But when Kenichi finally meets with Fu-chun, he finds that his former partner has followed her to Tokyo out of love, not anger. Like Cathy, the femme fatale of *Out of the Past*, Natsumi pretends that her goal is only freedom – to get out of the clutches of a brutal man – but it turns out that greed was her motive. Like so many femmes fatales, she enters into temporary alliances with various men (including Papa Yang), playing them off against one another. She has as many names as she has faces. She is not, in fact, Sato Natsumi; she has stolen the identity of a dead girl. Instead, Kenichi learns from his journalist contact that her real name is Fu-lian, called Xiao-lian in her family, and that she is in fact Fu-chun's little sister. Moreover, the journalist says, the girl seduced both her older brothers. Natsumi/Xiao-lian herself claims that the incest was rape. Yet whoever she is and whatever her story, Kenichi loves her. Time and again, he provides her with opportunities to prove her love and earn his trust; but each time, the

doubt remains. And when she fails the test the very last time, Kenichi kills her in a moment of supreme romanticism, as the two embrace tenderly watching falling snowflakes.

But even though Natsumi/Xiao-Lian fits the paradigm of the femme fatale in all its particulars, there is still something amiss. In classic American noir, the femme fatale is the all-powerful source of evil in the film's world; she poses a threat that cannot be met or contained. Only her elimination, usually by death, can restore stability and put the world to rights (as in the aforementioned *The Maltese Falcon*, *Out of the Past*, *The Lady from Shanghai* as well as many more). But Natsumi's death does not restore the world to balance. That is why the film does not end at that point. There is an epilogue in which Kenichi returns to destroy Papa Yang.

In point of fact, at the core of all three films is not the spider woman but the monstrous father. The femme fatale, where she exists at all in Noir East, turns out to be a decoy. She *appears* to be the monster, deflecting our attention from the real monster – the patriarch, the father. At the beginning of *The Longest Nite*, Mr K tells Sam he believes that Mr Hung, the dragon head/godfather of Macanese organised crime – the film even uses strains of *The Godfather* score for this character – is behind the plot to prevent peace between the rival gangs. But Sam is sceptical; he doubts (in a voice-over) that such an old man, one who has been absent from Macao for years, could be capable of such a thing. And the image of Mr Hung that accompanies Sam's thoughts – a frail old gentleman, quaintly dressed in traditional Chinese garb – adds to the idea of his impotence and inconsequence. But when this voice-over and image are presented again at the end of the film, after Sam, Mr K, Mr Lung, and so many other characters have been killed, its use is as ironic as the comparable narration from the dead that ends *Sunset Boulevard*. We realise that Hung, this harmless-looking old man, was the one that set the balls bouncing. It was he who created the intricate plan of literally clockwork precision to ensure the Red Poles and White Paper Fans – his symbolic sons in his triad family – would kill each other off, so that no one would be left to challenge his absolute authority.

As already described, the existence of the father figure of *Intruder* – the husband, Kwan-fai – is not even revealed until more than halfway through the film and he does not actually appear until the final reel. But when he does, his appearance makes his monstrousness manifest: instead of hands, he has deadly hooks which he uses to kill Sichan Aieh's husband. (When eluding Public Security after killing his landlord's family, Kwan-fai had lost his hands in an attack by police dogs.) As has already been noted, it was Kwan-fai who devised the horrible plan the dutiful Siu-yan has carried out. Moreover, while his wife could not kill Yinyin, he is ready to bash her brains in. If Kwan-fai causes the death of only four people and a dog, as opposed to the dozens that die in Mr Hung's game, it is only because he does not head a criminal empire – not yet, at any rate. The victim Chi-min is another monstrous father. He drove away his wife and threw away his daughter. But

callous though he is, Chi-min is no mass murderer and shows himself capable of redemption. When he overhears the words of his innocent daughter explaining to Siu-yan that Daddy doesn't love her because she isn't a good student, he is profoundly moved. He sincerely repents, as we hear in his confession to Siu-yan.

The most monstrous of all the fathers is *Sleepless Town*'s Papa Yang. Unlike the others, he is not initially inscribed as either absent or inconsequential; he is depicted as benevolent. He seems a loving father, as concerned for the welfare of his halfbreed (the film's term) bastard son as for his legitimate children. (This image owes much to the casting: Papa Yang was played by the well-respected Taiwanese actor Sihung Lung who often portrayed stern but loving fathers in such films as Ang Lee's *Pushing Hands* and *Eat Drink Man Woman*.) All the way through the film, he seems to take actions to help Kenichi out of his predicament, even encouraging him several times to flee to safety. But in the end, we learn that his hidden goal all along was to gain absolute control over the Chinese gangs in Japan by eliminating all competition. Early in the film, Papa Yang had told Kenichi that in order to put things right, 'a sacrifice might be needed'. Only at the end do we realise what Papa Yang was willing to sacrifice: not his symbolic sons or his would-be daughters, but his own flesh and blood.[13] Natsumi/Xiao-Lian may have been ready to kill Kenichi, her lover, in order to save her own life; but Papa Yang is ready to have Kenichi die to increase his power.[14]

The weakened position or absence of the femme fatale in Noir East films might lead some to conclude that the Hong Kong filmmakers had learned the conventions of the genre imperfectly, or even that the films should not be classified as noir at all. In reality, however, instead of applying a formula mechanically, they have transformed the genre's conventions to meet their own cultural needs. The demonisation of woman in original *film noir* has long been understood as male response to the increased social and economic independence of women in American society:

> Passed through the noir filter, the 'new woman', forced by social circumstance and economic necessity to assert herself in ways that her culture had not previously encouraged, emerged on the screen as a wicked, scheming creature, sexually potent and deadly to the male.[15]

But this situation is fundamentally Western and particularly American, and has no parallel – especially in resonance – in Asian cultures. On the other hand, societies based on Confucian values are deeply patriarchal. Conflicts between sons and their often overbearing and censorious fathers have been a staple of Hong Kong cinema for decades, with such stories functioning on both personal and political levels.[16] Therefore, there is nothing surprising in the fact that while classic American *films noirs* allude to the threat to male authority, Noir East films depict the stranglehold patriarchy still has on Asian

society. What is new in Noir East is the rendering of Confucian patriarchy in such an extreme form, which in and of itself suggests a challenge to it.

But if Noir East films do not reflect, as their American predecessors did, a crisis of masculine power, what do they reflect? Is there a psycho-social crisis at the heart of these films? To answer requires consideration of another difference between *film noir* and Noir East: the representation of violence. In American noirs, violence is more potential than actual. The threat of violence is constant, but its realisation infrequent. When violence does occur, it is usually of short duration: a single upper cut to the jaw or whack over the head that instantly renders the character unconscious. And when deadly force is used, it is often a single gunshot, maybe two – but rarely anything like the orgasmic prolonged release of the Tommy gun that characterises the gangster film (the climax of *The Lady From Shanghai* being an important exception to this rule). In *film noir*, it is dying that is frequently prolonged (*Double Indemnity*, *Touch of Evil*), not the killing. And for the deaths that do occur in *film noir*, there's almost never any blood. Bullets, following the Hollywood convention, leave neat clean little holes in bodies from which no blood flows. In those rare instances where a sharp instrument is used – as in, for example, *Scarlet Street* where the protagonist in a rage kills the femme fatale with an ice pick – the brutal act is not directly shown.

In this regard *Sleepless Town* approximates the classic model of American *film noir*, but the two Noir East produced in Hong Kong are filled with overt and extremely bloody violence. Both, in fact, contain scenes of mutilation or the mutilated, living or dead. In *Intruder*, Siu-yan beats both Chi-min and his dog so severely with blunt objects that blood flies everywhere and she has to clean up the gruesome mess with a mop. But that is nothing compared to the bloody aftermath of her attack on his mother with a screwdriver. As already described, Kwan-Fai dispatches the husband of Sichan Aieh with his hooks. And at the end of the film, Chi-min's lifeless body is shown: trussed up in the ominous medical hardware Siu-yan had bought, his hands have been lopped off with the machete, and he has been left to bleed to death. *The Longest Nite*, in addition to its several gun battles, contains equally graphic instances of violence. The corrupt cop Sam is depicted from the beginning as extremely brutal: early on he is shown bludgeoning both hands of a would-be hitman to a bloody pulp (so that the man won't be able to hold a gun, much less fire it); when a triad member won't reveal who is behind the rumour of the contract on Mr Lung even during a beating, Sam shoves the man's hand in a vice and, in close-up, drives a shaft deep under his fingernail; he holds Maggie's head down on a desk and threatens, again in close-up, to puncture her eye with a sharpened pencil unless she agrees to lie about who killed the nightclub owner, Lo. But Sam is the (direct or indirect) victim of violence as well. In the beginning of the film, the body found in Sam's apartment is headless; the head, as previously mentioned, is eventually found in the locker at the pier. In the climactic showdown between Sam and Tony in the factory, Tony is decapitated, his head falling amidst the debris of the collapsing building. The

gruesome implication of the film's final scene of several men leaving the compound carrying trash bags and driving away with them in different directions is all too clear: Sam has been cut into pieces so that his body parts can be widely dispersed.

This overt violence in the Noir East films compared to the relative restraint of *films noirs* might seem easily explicable: on the one hand, American films in the 1940s and 1950s were constrained by the Production Code; on the other, Hong Kong cinema has long been known for its penchant for extreme violence. The significance, however, lies not in the violence *per se*, but in its dominant form – dismemberment – and function – the acquisition or masking of identity. The simplest of the films, *Intruder*, eventually reveals that the Mainland couple has undertaken their murderous spree with the sole purpose of acquiring Hong Kong identity cards. Siu-yan killed Sichan Aieh in Shenzhen to obtain her papers, which she uses not merely to cross the border into Hong Kong, but to obtain a provisional Hong Kong ID as the spouse of a Hong Kong resident. (There are numerous scenes at the immigration offices, presenting the bureaucratic process in detail.) It is fairly easy to take care of her own identity, but her husband's poses a greater problem. That is where the victim, Chi-min, comes in. The plan is for Kwan-fai to pose as Chi-min: claiming his ID card has been lost, the former thus applies for a duplicate. For that, he needs not only all Chi-min's papers and biographical information, but something else. The couple cut off Chi-min's hands and fit them to Kwan-Fai's stumps (in such a way that he appears to have been severely injured in a car accident) so that he can have Chi-min's fingerprints. (This means of establishing identity was foreshadowed at the beginning of the film when Siu-yan cuts off Sichan Aieh's hair to make braids that she then attaches to her own hair to help complete the illusion that she is the murdered woman.) Escaping to Hong Kong from the Mainland is an easy matter. Dozens if not hundreds of illegal immigrants do it every night. But for Kwan-fai, it is not enough to be *in* Hong Kong; he must *become* 'Heung Gong yahn' – a Hong Konger. And to do that, he must take the place of an actual Hong Kong resident.

Not surprisingly, heads rather than hands are the focus of identity in *The Longest Nite*. Without a head, the naked body in Sam's apartment cannot be identified. Similarly, the gang member Sam brutalises, symbolically decapitated by the hood over his head, has no identity. More significantly, the first image of Tony, riding the bus across the bridge from Taipa to Macao, is the back of his head. It is shaven to an extreme buzz cut revealing an elaborate dragon tattoo on the base of his skull. This is so distinctive that the back of his head, rather than the front – i.e., the face – comes to identify him. (Sam repeatedly refers to him as 'Baldy'.) Near the end of the film, Sam realises that the trap that has been set for him is inexorable when (as described above) he finds the corpse's head and discovers that it belongs to his boss, Mr K. After that, Sam knows he cannot survive, so he ceases to be Sam. When Tony arrives at the abandoned factory, he discovers that Sam

has shaved *his* head and duplicated the unique tattoo on the base of *his* skull. Sam's strategy for survival is to assume Tony's identity. When the destruction of the building in the ensuing gun battle causes the decapitation, the spectator cannot tell which man has been killed since both their heads now look the same. It is not until we see Sam's face when he arrives at the rendezvous point that we learn it was Tony who died. As has already been noted, Sam is then himself killed – by being shot through the dragon tattoo at the base of his skull. In the film's final irony, Sam escapes being killed as Sam only to be killed as Tony. As different as *Intruder* and *The Longest Nite* are, both films revolve around characters who believe that their only chance of survival is to give up their own identities and steal the identities of others, characters who fight to the death to possess a single identity. In both cases, this transformation requires the corporeal dismemberment of the original, as if in some black magic ritual.

Sleepless Town, however, does not employ the motif of dismemberment. Arguably the most complex and resonant of the three Noir East films, it too explores questions of identity, but these are presented in terms of cultural concepts not visceral images. If *The Longest Nite* and *Intruder* are concerned with the immediate present (as indicated by their allusions to the retrocessions of Hong Kong and Macao), *Sleepless Town* is concerned with the past, with matters of Chinese history and culture. The film poses the question of identity with its first breath. A policeman stops Kenichi in the street and demands his alien registration card. When Kenichi replies that he is Japanese, the cop scoffs because he had just heard Kenichi speaking Mandarin. Then an off-screen voice calls out that Kenichi is a halfbreed, and another voice adds, 'Who knows what he is?' In the steadicam shot that follows, Kenichi presents his own perspective in a voice-over. He states that he is not Japanese and not Chinese. In other words, he defines his own ethnic identity in the negative, as double absences, as if, in his blended parentage (Japanese mother and Taiwanese father) the two ethnicities cancelled each other out. This attitude affects his actions. He keeps apart from Papa Yang's family circle partaking of dim sum at the beginning of the film. When Xiao-wen, the half-brother to whom he is closest, urges him to join the family at table, Kenichi complains that they are all speaking Taiwanese. Xiao-wen chides Kenichi that he never bothered to learn the dialect; Kenichi retorts that no one ever bothered to teach him. Although there are no explicit references to history in regards to Kenichi, his mixed parentage alludes to the historical relationship between Japan and Taiwan. During the Japanese rule over the island (1895–1945), and despite the undoubted negative aspects of that occupation, there were a number of blended children produced of both marriages and extra-marital liaisons. And the ties that were forged between the two communities in the first half of the twentieth century are still very much in evidence today, both in the myriad Japanese influences on Taiwanese life and the sizable Taiwanese community residing in Japan. Nonetheless, the bitterness of the Chinese

towards Japanese due to the wartime atrocities, as well as Japan's bigotry towards ethnic minorities, cannot but mark the life of a half-Chinese, half Japanese child. This is even more explicit in the case of *Sleepless Town*'s other 'blended' character. When Kenichi first meets the *femme fatale*, she is 'passing' as Japanese, using the name Sato Natsumi. But later we learn that she is actually Fu-lian, known in her family as Xiao-lian (Little Lian), the younger sister and incestuous lover of Fu-chun; furthermore, her Japanese name is, in fact, Michiko. Now it is commonplace in *film noir* for the *femme fatale* to go by several names in the course of the story. For example, the character played by Mary Astor in *The Maltese Falcon* uses four different names. In American *film noir*, these multiple names/identities signify the femme fatale's duplicity and untrustworthiness. But in *Sleepless Town*, the multiple identities are truths, not lies. The Natsumi identity may be false, but all the other names, Chinese and Japanese, are truly hers. It is not her duplicity but her multiplicity that is manifested in her various names, something that is again a product of history. Fu-chun and Xiao-lian are, we learn, war orphans' kids, a term that refers to the children of mixed Japanese-Chinese parentage left behind in Manchuria after the war and only much later repatriated to Japan.[17] There are references to the rejection and violence Fu-chun and Xiao-lian experienced when they arrived in Japan as children, and the suggestion is made that their criminality, even their incest, was a response to the hostility they encountered. It is no wonder that Kenichi was drawn to Natsumi/Xiao-lian, another character who understood what it meant to be part of both the Chinese and Japanese communities but accepted by neither. The problem of identity for the characters of *The Longest Nite* and *Intruder* is acquiring the 'right' one; but the problem for Kenichi and Xiao-lian is how to reconcile their multiple conflicting selves.

But *Sleepless Town* does not explore the question of identity by reference to modern history only; it also references ancient history, or, more properly, mythology. Early in the film, when Kenichi is compelled to call upon Yuan, he reminds the latter that when he first came to Tokyo, Kenichi lent him a book, which was none other than the masterwork of Chinese literature, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. There are numerous explicit references to the novel in the film. Yuan, for example, likens Kenichi to Liu Bei because, Yuan says, he serves three masters;[18] and near the end of the film, when Kenichi has worked out the complex web of secret deals and betrayals made amongst the various triads, he remarks that it is just like in *Three Kingdoms*. But beyond these explicit references, it is possible to draw numerous parallels between the film and the novel, since both detail internecine warfare and shifting alliances. And if Yuan is an imperfect reflection of Guan Yu and Cui-hu an equally imperfect Zhang Fei, there can be little doubt that Papa Yang is every inch Cao Cao, one of the greatest villains of Chinese historical literature. In *Sleepless Town*, characters do not borrow body parts but legendary personae in their attempts to establish identities.

Conclusion

The question arises why a number of Hong Kong filmmakers turned to the noir genre in roughly the same year. The fact that that year spanned the Handover (as well as a sharp economic recession that plagued much of East Asia) would seem to point to a possible answer. Both *film noir* and Noir East, with their pessimism and fatalism, their confusion and uncertainties, are symptomatic of societies in turmoil, upheaval. *Film noir*, with its focus on the femme fatale, reveals a crisis in male identity and authority in postwar America (in its original phase) and in post-Vietnam/post-Watergate America (in its neo-noir phase). But gender identity, as has been shown, is not a central issue in Noir East films, which present patriarchal power as absolute as ever. It is, rather, cultural identity that these films present in crisis. As Stuart Hall has noted,

> Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, [cultural identities] are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. … [I]dentities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past.[19]

It would be simplistic to suggest that the Handover caused this crisis of cultural identity for the Hong Kong Chinese; the causes were myriad and stretch back many years before the Joint Declaration. But the actual moment of the long-anticipated return of Hong Kong, with all its pomp and circumstance, made manifest that play of history, culture and power to which Hall refers. It is not surprising then that this event was accompanied by tales of characters who are actively engaged in positioning themselves within their narratives. What is telling, however, is their desperation. In *Intruder* and *The Longest Nite*, we are presented with characters who go to any length to slough off their original identities and acquire new ones, false ones, to literally become an/other. In *Sleepless Town* we have characters comprised of multiple identities, but unable to come to terms with their hybridity. These films then seem to indicate a deep anxiety about identity in Hong Kong Chinese society at this momentous point in their history.

There is, however, another way to understand Hong Kong filmmakers' sudden appropriation and transmutation of American *film noir*. As has been shown, these filmmakers have proved themselves completely conversant with the conventions, iconography, narrative patterns, and stylistics of the genre, and fully adept at applying them. But in the case of *The Longest Nite* and *Sleepless Town*, at any rate, the filmmakers have gone farther than that by their allusions to and quotations from specific films in the noir canon: *The Lady from Shanghai* and *Chinatown*. One reason for choosing these two films is obvious: each contains references to things Chinese.[20] In *Chinatown*, for instance, we learn that the protagonist, Jake Gittes, used to work for the DA's office in Los Angeles' Chinatown. Although we never learn exactly

what transpired, we do know that this experience marked him deeply. When questioned by Evelyn Mulwray all he will say is, 'I was trying to keep someone from being hurt. In the end all I did was make sure she got hurt'. At the end of the film, history has repeated itself. He had tried to protect Evelyn also, but he has just seen the police shoot her dead, and is realising that once again his actions to protect a woman have inadvertently led to her destruction. Moreover, he knows that just as Evelyn has lost, her father Noah Cross, who is the well of unspeakable evil in the film, has won. As Jake faces this horrific enormity, his associate speaks the only possible words of simultaneous explanation and consolation: 'Forget it, Jake. It's Chinatown.' The Chinatown to which he refers is not geographic; rather, it is a symbolic space, ruled by implacable forces, rendering one's actions futile. (This is why, when Evelyn asks Jake what he did in Chinatown, he replies: 'As little as possible.') Chinatown represents everything beyond one's understanding and outside one's control – a perfect locus for noir.

'Forget it, Jake. It's Chinatown' is the last line of dialogue in that film. And one of the first lines of dialogue in *Sleepless Town* is: 'Don't fuck with the Chinese. This is Kabukicho.'[21] It is said by an older cop to a younger one to stop him from hassling Kenichi – about his identity. Whether in Japan or the United States, Chinatown is a place the authorities realise is best to leave alone. There is more than this faint echo that ties the two films together, however. In both, the protagonist alternately suspects and attempts to protect femme fatale; in both, the femme fatale is marked by incest; in both, the femme fatale is killed while escaping; in both, a seemingly benevolent patriarch secretly attempts to consolidate power by having his minions do the dirty work; in both, the femme fatale is used to deflect attention away from the patriarch; in both, the insidiousness of this man is indicated by the depth of his betrayal and abuse both within his family and his community. Both films strive to establish a resonance beyond the surface of the plot, the one through the deployment of archetypal imagery (water and desert), the other through the use of archetypal characters. Of course, *Sleepless Town* is no remake of *Chinatown*; rather, beginning as it does where the other left off, it positions itself as a continuation, even perhaps a palimpsest. It clearly has more to say; and one subject it has more to say on is Chinese identity. Despite its title and the setting of its final scene, *Chinatown* actually has nothing to do with Chinese culture. The only Chinese characters are Evelyn Mulwray's servants and confidants, who are depicted as one-dimensional cyphers. Chinese-ness is used simply as a code for all that is opaque, unfathomable. Against this reductive notion, *Sleepless Town*, in the course of presenting its tale of warring factions among the triads, reveals the multiplicity of Chinese identities, revelling in the differences among Beijingers, Shanghainese, Taiwanese and Cantonese – differences not merely of dialect, but in the way they dress, the way they act, what and how they eat. Chinese identity and culture may be problematic in *Sleepless Town*, but at least it is dynamic. By means of the complexity of its characters, as

well as its references to Chinese history and culture, *Sleepless Town* stands in opposition to the ahistorical, acultural, reductive representations of the Chinese in *Chinatown*.

The representations of Chinese characters and culture in *The Lady from Shanghai* are also stereotypical and superficial. The 'lady' in question is not Chinese but nonetheless from China: Elsa claims to be a White Russian who lived in Chifu, Macao (woefully mispronounced by both Hayworth and Welles), before fetching up in Shanghai. In the early part of the film as she is seducing Michael, she makes reference to her upbringing by spouting fortune cookie proverbs: 'The Chinese say, it is difficult for love to last long. Therefore, one who loves passionately is cured of love in the end' and 'Human nature is eternal. Therefore, one who follows his nature keeps his original nature in the end'. But the greatest use of Chinese references occurs at the film's end. When Michael, on trial for a murder for which Elsa has framed him, uses his feigned suicide attempt to effect his escape from the courthouse, he runs seemingly without purpose; but it is surely noir fate rather than mere chance that leads him into San Francisco's Chinatown. Of course, by going to Chinatown, Michael has ensured that he will be found (caught or rescued?) by Elsa. This is clearly her territory. Michael seems to wanders aimlessly; Elsa knows exactly where she is. Several times in her pursuit she speaks to Chinese bystanders in Cantonese (flat, toneless, obviously phonetically-learned Cantonese, to be sure) and uses the information she receives from the 'natives' to track Michael. Like Evelyn Mulwray, Elsa too has a Chinese servant/henchman, and that is whom she calls when she finally catches up with Michael at a Peking Opera theatre. He is shown in a room with other Chinese men, apparently waiting for her call which causes them to spring into action. They rush to the theatre, cause a diversion, and sandbag Michael. Elsa then, far from being the damsel in distress she pretends to be for most of the film, turns out to be a true dragon lady, head of a Chinatown gang. The final climactic scene of the film does not take place in Chinatown but in the funhouse of a closed amusement park. The imagery here is 'Caligarish', not Chinoiserie, but it is worth noting that when Michael falls through the trap door and slides down the chute, he is belched out of a Chinese dragon's mouth moments before his final meeting with Elsa. The imaginary China invoked in *The Lady from Shanghai* is a netherworld, sinister and unfathomable to the protagonist (despite his time as a sailor in the South China Sea). As in *Chinatown*, it is used metaphorically to signify all that is unknowable, uncertain, and uncontrollable in the noir world. The 'inscrutable' Chinese are perfect denizens of that world. The unnatural otherness of femme fatale Elsa is inscribed in her access to – nay, her power in – this world.

But if *Sleepless Town* recuperates the racist stereotypes of *Chinatown*, *The Longest Nite* challenges *The Lady from Shanghai* in a different way. Although *The Longest Nite* gives proof to Elsa's assertion that Macao is 'the wickedest city in the world', there are no similarities of narrative between

the two films other than the fact that both are based on elaborate plots to make the protagonist the 'fall guy' for the nefarious actions of others. Rather than via plot and character, *The Longest Nite* establishes its intertextual relationship with its referent by means of cinematic style. Specifically, *The Longest Nite* recreates the best-known scene from *The Lady from Shanghai*, the shoot-out between the femme fatale Elsa and her husband Arthur Bannister in the funhouse hall of mirrors, in its shoot-out between Sam and Tony in the abandoned factory. But the Hong Kong film does not merely quote or copy the American; in its mise-en-scène, cinematography, and editing, it elaborates, extends and complicates the original staging. The gimmick, as it were, of the scene in *The Lady from Shanghai* is that the hall of mirrors setting prevents the characters (and the spectators) from knowing whether Bannister and Elsa are shooting at the other person or at the reflection. Images of the two are multiplied and superimposed, and then shattered as the bullets fly, until all is destroyed and both lie dying. But in *The Longest Nite*, Sam has, it will be remembered, changed his appearance to resemble Tony; therefore, as they begin to fire each cannot tell if he is shooting at the other, the image of the other, *or the image of himself*. Thematically, then, *The Longest Nite* enriches the conceit of the mirror reflections by carrying it beyond duplicity and uncertainty to self-destruction. Bannister's line to Elsa just before the shooting starts – 'Of course, killing you is like killing myself' – is turned from verbal simile to visual metaphor in *The Longest Nite*. Moreover, the setting of the scene in *The Lady from Shanghai* is a hall of mirrors – simply a large number of mirrors in an otherwise empty room. But the mise-en-scène of the abandoned factory is much richer visually; besides its many reflective surfaces, there are broken beams, old tires, broken pieces of machinery. This detritus not only provides an apt setting for this story of moral corruption, but it also provides the characters with a more complex environment for their game of hide-and-seek. And use it they do. While Bannister and Elsa basically stand in place during their shoot-out, Sam and Tony move throughout the large factory during theirs, allowing for the kind of elegant action choreography that has been one of the hallmarks of Hong Kong filmmaking for years. At the end of the fight between Elsa and her husband, when Michael turns on the lights, we see nothing but many shards of glass in an empty room. But in the fight between Sam and Tony, as glass breaks, the pieces rise up and swirl in the charged atmosphere like the dust motes in the scene in the cell. Their battle is so monumental that the entire factory is destroyed by it. It is while the factory falling to pieces out from under them that Tony is decapitated by a flying piece of corrugated roofing. Ultimately, then, it is the noir universe itself rather than human agency that decides who lives and who dies.

Despite the fact that for many decades Hong Kong possessed one of the largest and most successful film industries in the world, Hong Kong cinema had never received much respect in the West, where it was invariably deprecated with the term 'chop socky'. By the time these Noir East films

were made, the Hong Kong film industry was is in crisis. Output had fallen sharply; many of its ancillary markets had been lost; a number of its top directors and stars had emigrated. There were some who went so far as to predict the end of Hong Kong film. The fatalism and despair of noir surely seems the appropriate mood for the industry. And yet, the adoption of noir by Hong Kong filmmakers should not be seen as signalling a resigned capitulation to the Hollywood juggernaut. Quite the contrary. Their adaptation and transformation of noir conventions and paradigms to fit their culture is no act of surrender. Their critique and correction of the racism found in the American *films noirs* is the opposite of self-abnegation. Not only their demonstration of possession over the forms of noir, but their conscious and deliberate citations of masterworks of the American canon, is an assertion of equality with, not inferiority to, Hollywood. To take on no less a figure than Orson Welles, to restage one of his best-known examples of bravura filmmaking, and to outdo him, bespeaks a tremendous cinematic self-confidence. Noir East films, in their themes and stories, may indeed reflect the crisis of identity facing the Hong Kong people; but in their assured mastery of cinematic expression, their makers leave no doubt about *their* identity as filmmakers.

10 Scenes of 'in-action' and noir characteristics in the films of Johnnie To (Kei-Fung)

Peter Rist[1]

Johnnie (or 'Johnny') To is the most prominent Hong Kong film director/producer not to have tried his luck in Hollywood, and I speculate that with his penchant for action genre filmmaking, given the right conditions – with the kind of freedom and control allowed John Woo, for example – he could make the transition very successfully. (A negative example would be Tsui Hark who perhaps did not choose his Hollywood projects wisely, and who seemed to have taken the title of *Knock Off* literally in his approach to making films in America.) To has certainly given the prospect of working in the United States a lot of thought. During his visit to Montreal in 1999 he talked of making the move, but only on his own terms, where he would be able work similarly to the way he does in Hong Kong – a very unlikely prospect.

Initially, To was best known as a director of comedies – including one with Stephen Chiao Sing-Chi, *Justice, My Foot* (1992) – and the two contemporary action fantasies featuring three female stars, Michelle Yeoh, Maggie Cheung and the late Anita Mui, *The Heroic Trio* and *The Executioners* (both 1993). But, in 1997, he really hit his stride and found his style with *Lifeline*, a story of collective effort against the odds, where fire and explosions provide the ominous noir-esque keylighting of dark, entrapping warehouse and factory interiors. Whereas To had made 24 films in the 16 years before *Lifeline*, he has since become extremely prolific, making 28 films in the next 7 years for his Milky Way and One Hundred Years of Cinema outfits. Of the 11 films produced and/or directed by To in 1997–99, no fewer than 8 have some *film noir* characteristics, but in the last 4 years, what we might call 'the Wai Ka-Fai era' – Wai co-directed 9 of 11 films helmed by To – comedy and romance tend to lighten up To's oeuvre.

Comparative discussion of genre and *film noir* across Hollywood/Hong Kong borders is complex. The term *film noir* is, of course, French, being coined by French-based critics after they noticed new, darker, somewhat 'realist' stylistic and thematic tendencies in Hollywood cinema, following *Citizen Kane* (1941).[2] Although the term has mostly been applied to American films, it has also been used to retroactively describe aspects of the French cinema of the 1930s and the World War II occupation period, British

films of the late1930s and 1940s, and so on. There has also been a lot of discussion of noir stylistics in contemporary Hollywood action movies (and more serious fare, like David Fincher/Darius Kondji's *Seven* [1995]), and the question of whether or not we can consider colour films as noir has arisen.[3] Part of the appeal of the 1940s crime-laden Hollywood 'melodramas' is that they were shot on black and white film stock. In response to the question asked of Johnny To on *PTU* (2003), 'How did you decide your style?', the director responded:

> The most important thing is to have black and white clearly stated. That is you must clearly delineate everything that appears in the realm of strong light and those that appear in the realm of weak light. This decides the style of the cinematography and the content. The style is black and white … there's also grey … it would be much better if I could make it in black and white.[4]

Looking back on this period, and following on the making of *The Mission* and *Running Out of Time* (both 1999), To discussed that in a time of economic downturn, where the film industry was also experiencing serious hardships, he wanted to make more optimistic films.[5] Around the period of the handover to the People's Republic of China in 1997 there was a general sense of critical unease, even, pessimism in many films produced in Hong Kong, but To's work with *The Longest Nite*, *A Hero Never Dies* and *Expect the Unexpected* (all released in 1998) are clearly situated at the dark end of the spectrum. Interestingly, two of these films were credited to one 'Patrick Yau' as director. Yau is something of an enigma. As far as I can tell he never directed another theatrical feature after this and To talks of the films as if they were his own. In an interview conducted for the career retrospective that he was granted by the 23rd Hong Kong International Film Festival in 1999 he answered the question, 'What are the three films most important to you?', with '*Loving You* (1995), *The Longest Nite*, and *Expect the Unexpected*'.[6] In discussing the second and third of these films he never once mentioned Yau's name, although he mentions Wai Ka-Fai favourably as the person who sorted out problems related to *The Longest Nite*'s script 'puzzles'.[7] Wai was the co-producer. At a workshop session held in Montreal later that year during the Fantasia Film Festival, To spoke of Yau very disparagingly. In response to panelist Julien Fonfrède saying that he heard Yau had been sent back to television by Milky Way, To responded that Yau had 'worked for years as an assistant director' and that 'after *The Longest Nite* and *The Odd One Dies* [the first film where Yau was credited as director] we suggested that he go back to television and learn some skills before returning to film'.[8] To claimed that his 'student' Yau was unable to master 'mise-en-scène' and that he had to replace him as the director of *A Hero Never Dies*. In a conversation I had after this conference with Christina K. Y. Lee, who was at that time a Milky Way vice-president, she told me that, in

effect, To had executive-produced *The Odd One Dies* and that Yau's name was only put on the film to enable him to continue as a director.[9] It would appear that he did not measure up to Milky Way's expectations on his next assignments, and yet all these films exist as remarkably good looking, fairly coherent examples of Hong Kong Noir.

In its nihilistic conclusion, where both bad, corrupted cop (Tony Leung Chiu-wai) and relatively sympathetic contract killer (Lau Ching-wan) die at the end, *The Longest Nite* is arguably the darkest of the 'Dark Trilogy of 1998' (in Sam Ho's words).[10] It is also, perhaps, the bleakest depiction of policeman and criminal as being virtually indistinguishable human beings, a staple theme in John Woo's oeuvre (albeit, highly romanticised in his hands) which came to prominence in 1993 with Kirk Wong's *Organized Crime and Triad Bureau* – with former buddies on opposite sides of the law – and which has received its greatest commercial Hong Kong success with the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy in 2003, but which can be traced back to the doppelganger (double) in Fritz Lang's German films, especially *M* (1931), and, perhaps most remarkably, to Tomu Uchida's Japanese silent film *Keisatsukan* (Policeman, 1933). The action of *The Longest Nite* is unrelentingly nasty and brutal, even 'ugly', especially in its misogynistic treatment of an addicted femme fatale gangster/informer (Maggie Shiu) who is being beaten-up throughout her appearances, but the ugliness is counterpointed by the 'beauty' of Ko Chiu-lam's widescreen, cinemascope cinematography. The ultimate effect is of its Macau, predominantly nighttime, setting, being rendered as a strangely dangerous one. Less than 5 minutes of *The Longest Nite*'s 84-minute running time is allotted to daytime exteriors, near the beginning and at the very end, and, although 10 minutes of the middle section is spent in apparent daytime interiors (which are key, rather than fill-lit), the effect is of one 'long nite'. The sense of entrapment produced here is increased in two scenes which take place at the Macao ferry terminal, where the possibility of escape to Hong Kong is thwarted.[11] The penultimate scene, a 9-minute showdown between the two central characters in a deserted warehouse, is definitive. Up until this point, good use had been made of coloured decor, enhanced with gaudy neon lighting, but here the colour palette is reduced to blue, black and white. Highly derivative of the fun-house, hall of mirrors climax to Orson Welles' *Lady From Shanghai* (1948), and its pastiche in Bruce Lee's *Enter the Dragon* (1973), which is definitely not a *film noir*, this scene exemplifies Johnnie To's ability to construct and build intensity as much through choreography, shot composition, lighting and editing as through the action.

The police action of *PTU* unfolds during one long night. Similar to *The Longest Nite*, *PTU* (an acronym for 'Police Tactical Unit') contains scenes of police brutality, but here they are more stylised through gesture and repetition. There is also more colour, especially in the beginning with punks in a brightly lit restaurant, wherein hierarchy comically determines where everyone sits, and the khaki of the tactical unit's uniforms (more like soldiers

than cops) provides a greenish monochromatic look to the bulk of the film, except for one strikingly blue-tinged scene where a sudden burst of rain leads to the unit members donning raincoats. And, after the unexpected, sudden, violent denouement to the opening scene, leaving the top punk, 'Pony Tail', dead and the controlling sergeant on the beat (Lam Suet) without his gun and with a scratched and graffitied yellow-spray-painted car, apart from the few strange occurrences of police brutality, there is no more 'action' until the final shoot out, where two crime bosses and a few of their underlings are killed. Herein lies the strength of *PTU*. The tension in waiting for something to happen is palpable and it is through the visual control of the build-up, where dialogue is also sparse, that To and his team excel.

PTU is the second film in an intended trilogy which began with *The Mission*. Admittedly inspired by Akira Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* (1954), To says that 'It's a film that is only possible because of Kurosawa … ', and that he was influenced 'in particular' by 'the movement within stillness', and possibly also influenced by Takeshi Kitano's characters who play games while they wait. In *The Mission* we find the hallmark of To's mature style with his dramatic and cinematic staging and shooting of these 'in-action' scenes.[12] I am reminded here of David Bordwell's discussion of 'intensified continuity' in contemporary Hollywood and Hong Kong filmmaking and, whereas I feel that a lack of continuity rather than adherence to continuity often characterises the Hollywood work in question (especially films 'by' the infamous Michael Bay), there is no denying the 'intensity' (in To's work there is a clever shifting from continuity to non-continuity, and a rather different spin on 'intensity').[13] In any event, one scene in *The Mission* is so brilliantly constructed along these lines that, when I first saw it, I couldn't resist clapping at its conclusion. The scene begins with the architectural mapping-out of a shopping mall and with tracing the path of five bodyguards and their 'boss'. The incessant build-up to a gun battle is achieved through camera movement and the movement of escalators within the frame. The large cylindrical columns and reflecting surfaces of the mall's decor come into play, hiding and revealing characters, and, although I haven't been able to check this definitively, shot-by-shot, it may well be that geographic continuity is fully maintained even during the potential chaos of the ensuing shoot-out. But, brilliantly, To subliminally breaks continuity during the downward movement of the group of protagonists by actually eliding 'Boss' Lung (Joe Hung) in two shots. The bodyguards are doing such a good job, they make him disappear! Although someone (e.g. Tony Rayns, who considers To to be a 'hack' director) might wish to argue that this represents a gap in continuity, I am sure that the opposite is true – that To knew fully well what he was doing and used the magical, momentary disappearance of the boss to test the film spectator's powers of vision and to predict the successful outcome of 'The Mission' for us: to hide and save the triad king-pin. I am more encouraged to think this after reading David Bordwell's description of an encounter with To: 'When he explains a camera angle or an

actor's gesture, his guarded smile broadens, and he excitedly recalls how the scene was shot.'[14] Indeed, I challenged myself to provide a class of film aesthetics students with a concise, accurate, model description of the key elements comprising this 'in-action' scene from *The Mission* after testing them on their ability to describe just a 1-minute clip of the scene, and I needed almost 1,400 words to do this (see the Appendix to this chapter[15]). The twelve shots of this prelude to the shoot-out all contain some kind of movement (camera, character or other) and their total duration is only 68 seconds (meaning that the average shot length is less than 6 seconds). Even though one could argue that nothing essential is happening here, To has marked the potential for violent action through dynamising the space and time, while simultaneously injecting a great deal of tension into the scene.

Arguably, during the period under question here (1997–2003), Johnnie To developed into the finest genre director working anywhere in the world. Immediately following the handover of Hong Kong by the British to the People's Republic of China, his films, both as producer and director, were characterised by strains of pessimism and unpleasantness, making his work not especially popular with local audiences. These tendencies can be understood as being close to the *film noir* characteristics of Hollywood films of the late 1940s, especially in their focus on an urban nightscape of criminality, where distinctions between right and wrong, and good and bad are blurred considerably.[16] In the 'Dark Trilogy of 1998', *The Longest Nite*, *A Hero Never Dies* and *Expect the Unexpected*, where the actor Lau Ching-wan is established as being a quintessential noir male hero, To experimented with characterisation, action and style to such an extent that he risked alienating audiences, especially in *The Longest Nite*, where the light of day is virtually non-existent. Although he lightened up considerably after this, especially with the films co-directed by Wai Ka-fai, he continued to experiment with noir stylistics, and he intensified a concentration on the time leading-up to the action rather than the action itself. The monochrome nightscape of noir dominates *PTU* and scenes of 'in-action' are more prominent than pure 'action' scenes in *The Mission*. Clearly, with features such as these being reworked and modified, Johnnie To was becoming a significant, highly original filmmaker, to rank amongst the world's greatest film *auteurs*.

Part III

International players and a global niche

11 Hong Kong goes international

The case of Golden Harvest

Mike Walsh

The international success of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and the crossover prominence of its stars and directors in Hollywood has recently led the Hong Kong industry to speculate on the possibilities for higher budget production aimed at global markets.[1] There have also been regular reports of US companies preparing to invest enormously in Asian production.[2] The failure of films such as *The Medallion* and *The Touch* and the experience of *Hero* and *Shaolin Soccer* in Miramax's distribution limbo demonstrate how tenuous such hopes can be. It is particularly relevant at this time to consider the forerunner status of Golden Harvest (hereafter GH) in order to understand the obstacles in the path of Hong Kong companies seeking to globalise regional success.

The example of a company like Miramax (a subsidiary of Disney) is important here for two reasons. The first is that companies such as Disney and Columbia (the international distributor of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*) dominate film distribution in the United States which is still by far the largest single market in the world. As a first market, it enjoys the additional power of setting values for subsequent markets. A hit film in the United States accrues value in other international and ancillary markets. The second factor is that the control of this market has given the US distribution majors comparative advantage from which to expand internationally. They are not simply North American companies, but they also have built up global distribution networks which are vital to those with ambitions for global marketing. Those who optimistically ascribe a global future to Asian cinemas on the basis of production expertise or growing regional audiences still need to come to terms with difficulties of international distribution networks and access to production capital which bedevilled GH's ambitions.[3] Steve Fore has described GH as 'very adaptable' in the pursuit of its international ambitions.[4] I will be more pessimistic, pointing to the ways in which it clung to a limited number of strategies in a game which was always difficult.

Raymond Chow's break with Shaw Brothers in order to found GH is often explained in terms of tensions within Shaws. It is significant that Chow explained the founding of GH in 1970 as specifically related to his desire to break into fresh international markets:

> Then we had some differences of opinion on the future of Chinese films. I felt that it was time the Hong Kong film industry stepped in and started supplying the world market, as other film centres around the world were suffering severe economic crises.[5]

The crises to which Chow referred primarily involve the recession in the US industry which began in 1969 and extended through to the early 1970s.[6] He believed that Hong Kong was well placed within Asia to take advantage of this situation. His assessment was that the economic downturn of other regional industries such as Japan was linked to the in-roads made by television, though he discounted this as a factor in Hong Kong's domestic and major Asian markets, as they mainly had government-run television systems which offered comparatively little threat. Chow also assumed that with the US majors cutting production, their domestic and international distribution networks would be looking to alternative sources which had youth appeal and were relatively cheap. He had already seen the signs of this while at Shaw Brothers when MGM picked up the rights to *The One-Armed Swordsman* and distributed it successfully in Latin America.[7]

Chow's ability to launch GH as a full-blown major producer in Hong Kong can be attributed to three main factors. First, the company was established at a time when a vacuum in local production had opened up with the decline of Motion Picture and General Investment company (MP&GI, or Cathay) as a source of studio production. Cathay ceased production in 1971, and GH was able to take over its Yung Hwa studio complex as well as renting out production facilities to independents to offset costs.[8] Second, GH was able to access a pool of proven stars and directors who were willing to work with Chow, who was a leading figure in Hong Kong cinema. The last factor was the ability to secure financing from sources in Thailand and Taiwan so that GH could move to a higher production budget structure than Shaw.

Given the strength of this initial base, Chow's plan was to re-position Hong Kong films as crossover products not limited to Asian markets and the Chinese diaspora. The process of integrating GH into the lucrative European and American markets proceeded in a number of stages. The first was based on an initial breakthrough reaching its peak with Bruce Lee in 1973.

Enter the Dragon

In early 1972 GH had established a London office headed by Roy McAree, an ex-Paramount sales executive. At Cannes that year, the company attempted (not very successfully) to sell rights to a slate of films. Within a year, however, United States and European sales succeeded spectacularly for Hong Kong films. Italy was the first European country where kung-fu was appropriated on a large scale with companies such as Titanus picking up Shaw films and setting up co-productions. Warner Bros. also had great

success with *The Invincible Boxer* in Italy where the spaghetti western boom had begun to wane. *Variety* reported distributors in the Near East and Iran as buying kung-fu in early 1973 almost to the exclusion of anything else.[9]

The genre reached America in April, 1973 leading to the famed week in May when the three top films at the US box office – *Fists of Fury*, *Deep Thrust: The Hand of Death* and *Five Fingers of Death* – were all from Hong Kong.[10] It is easy to overstate this success though. Even at its peak, most of the films were released by small distributors, making modest returns albeit on small investments. Reviews were generally negative and often derisory.[11] By Christmas 1973, the peak of the genre had passed. In *Variety*'s 112 top-grossing films for the year only four were from Hong Kong.[12] For its part, the response of the US film industry to the Hong Kong martial arts film was comprised of three rapidly overlapping strategies: importation, cooperation, and then domestic replacement.

The importation phase involved picking up Hong Kong films for quick exploitation. Between spring and Christmas 1973, 38 Hong Kong films were released in the United States with the leading distributors being National General, American International Pictures and Warner Bros.[13] Raymond Chow's insight about the US industry recession was particularly apt here. National General (which distributed Bruce Lee films prior to the *Enter the Dragon*) was in severe difficulties as its major suppliers were CBS's production arm, Cinema Center Films (which had been wound up the preceding year) and First Artists, which transferred its distribution to Warner Bros. during 1973.[14]

The cooperation phase involved co-production. Shaw Brothers and GH were both looking for foreign participation to offset higher production costs but also to secure access to foreign markets. International co-production partners were generally interested in taking quick advantage of a popular genre, in Hong Kong's lower production costs, and in tailoring the films to make them more accessible to their own markets through imported stars, directors, and tie-ins with other domestically popular genres.

Shaw was heavily involved in co-production, mostly with Italy and Germany, though its biggest co-productions were with Hammer (*Dracula and the Seven Golden Vampires*, and *Shatter*, both 1974) and Warner Bros. (*Cleopatra Jones and the Casino of Gold*, 1975).[15] GH most famously partnered Warner Bros. and Lee's own production company, Concorde, with *Enter the Dragon*. Warner brought in its own producer, Fred Weintraub, and director, Robert Clouse, as well as several western stars. A comment in *Variety* that: 'The returns earned by the one Hollywood supervised entry proved that even an already popular genre can be improved by professionalism' indicated the assumed position of strength of the American participants.[16] The right to define 'professionalism' here can be read to indicate not just a set of production norms, but also a set of distribution relations in which Hollywood studios still enjoyed a hegemonic position. The weakness of the US industry during the early 1970s was one of those

dangerous, anomalous times which, in retrospect, signalled the end of the transitional period of the 1960s. The American industry recovered through a strategy of blockbusters such as *The Godfather*, *Poseidon Adventure* and *Jaws*. The trend in the United States was to releasing fewer films with higher budgets. The martial arts film survived in the margins, but largely by dint of the third strategy – replacement.

If Warner thought *Enter the Dragon* was a success because of the inclusion of American stars and production personnel, the logical next step was the complete domestication of the films. Blaxploitation mixes such as *Black Belt Jones* and *Black Karate* appeared toward the end of 1973 and in November, *Billy Jack*, mixing martial arts with more traditional gunplay, was a great success. The line from Chuck Norris to Steven Seagal, culminating in Keanu Reeves being touted by Joel Silver as a great martial artist, had been established. At the end of 1974, *Variety* summed up the state of kung-fu by writing: 'the kung-fu fad has lasted longer than most film genre gimmicks and its martial arts elements have been successfully incorporated into establishment US pix, so that a karate chop has become as fashionably cinematic as firing a revolver.'[17]

The kung fu explosion of 1973 had gained GH temporary access to the American market, but only on the basis of what was seen by the US production industry as a fad which could be domesticated. Hollywood dealt with the challenge by integrating aspects of the martial arts genre into its own pre-existent production structures and genre formulae. Hong Kong companies began to pay the price for becoming associated with a single genre and a single star. Their access had been only tenuous as GH lacked its own US distribution or any on-going production relationship with a major company with global reach.

After the Dragon

While GH continued to plan an increase in the scope of its export markets, it also set about consolidating its regional base as the springboard for this expansion. In 1975 GH acquired Panasia, a company begun by Andrew Vajna (latter of Carolco fame). For a time Panasia became a subsidiary through which it pursued foreign production. In 1975 GH also established a partnership with Towa, Japan's largest distributor of foreign films.[18] Not only did GH now have a distribution and exhibition network throughout Asia for its own films, but it also became part of the largest distribution system for non-Asian films within East Asia.

It seemed a small step from here to an expansion that aimed beyond the limits of production geared, in the first instance, to the Asian region. In October 1976, GH announced a slate of six films collectively budgeted at US$12 million, with western stars and locations.[19] This time the company took care to set up infrastructure in America, employing a film industry consultant, Max Youngstein, and then flying in representatives from all over

the world for a six-day conference to plan GH's campaign to become 'one of the world's major producers of high budget international films'.[20]

GH strengthened its international distribution by acquiring Cathay Films (London) which distributed throughout Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Latin America. This gave it control of its own distribution in all major markets, except the crucial North American one, where its 1978 releases were handled by Columbia. By January, 1978 the stakes had risen considerably when the company announced that it had upgraded its budgets for English-language production to US$26.4 million.[21] At Cannes that year, GH published advertisements actively inviting proposals for new international projects ('There is Another Way. If you think you have a winner call Golden Harvest International'.[22]) Later that year GH announced two films, *High Road to China* and *The Shipkiller*, budgeted at US$9 and US$15 million respectively.[23]

GH was not alone in this strategy. Regional exports were contracting due to factors such as the communist victories in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. Indonesia was also moving to stricter quotas on Chinese films, and taxes had risen in Singapore and Thailand. Among Hong Kong producers, Bang Bang Films (which grew out of Bang Bang Fashions) had suffered a costly failure with its US$2 million international film, *Foxbat*. Shaw Brothers' international plans were adversely affected by heavy foreign exchange losses in 1977, forcing them to offload their *Taipan* project announced in 1975 at US$15 million. Shaws adopted a new strategy in 1978, putting all their eggs in a single, shared basket, *Meteor*, co-produced with American International Pictures and Nippon Herald.[24]

By 1979, GH, Shaw Brothers and a number of others had made several attempts to produce films that would compete with Hollywood all around the world. These films had tended to have budgets that were relatively modest by Hollywood standards. It is important to stress that while Hollywood companies periodically make noises about containing costs, they generally want to make expensive films as a way of maintaining their comparative advantage internationally. This logic was brought home with a vengeance as the 1970s progressed. GH realised that it needed to produce high budget films with stars and spectacle to compete with the likes of *Jaws*, *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. A major problem for GH was that production costs in the United States had skyrocketed during 1979 with *Apocalypse Now*, *1941* and *Moonraker* all passing US$30 million in negative costs and *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* setting a new benchmark at US$43 million. GH was a profitable company, but these were astronomical sums would require a new phase of evolution in the company's structure.

Enter the banker

August 1979 marked a turning point for Golden Harvest's attempts to go global. The company scored a noteworthy coup in hiring Ron Dandrea, who

had been vice-president of global entertainment at the Bank of America. He was hyped in *Variety* as 'one of the few bank officials who act as a veritable cornerstone in the worldwide financing of feature film production'.[25] His addition heralded a leap forward in the internationalisation of the company at the levels of administration, financing and production. As well as hiring Dandrea as Chief Financial Officer, the company set up an expanded international sales staff with offices in London and Los Angeles. Ex-United Artists sales executive, Tom Gray, centralised the company's sales headquarters in London during 1980.

GH's transformation was given its first big push at MIFED in Milan in 1979. The company took out a ten-page insert in *Variety* to promote a slate of international films and reportedly signed distribution pre-sales of over US$5 million for 22 territories. To back this effort, GH announced the intention to have a new film in international release each month of 1981.[26] In February 1980, they announced six international films. These films were to be made through three distinct production structures. Two of them, *Cannonball Run* and a Sam Peckinpah-John Milius project, *The Texans*, were to be made for GH by Albert Ruddy Productions (Ruddy had established himself with *The Godfather*). A further three were to be made through Classic Films, a German financing vehicle, which gave Chow and Ruddy exclusive rights to produce and distribute films for them.[27] This provided a vital line of external finance as GH had previously relied on internal liquidity. The influence of Dandrea can be seen in the attempt to access international lines of production finance necessary to move GH to a new level as a global producer.

The final film out of this slate of six warrants special comment as it was a simultaneous move back to an old pattern at the time of these other new ventures. It was a single picture deal with Fred Weintraub to make *Battlecreek Brawl* (finally released in the United States as *The Big Brawl*) a Jackie Chan film which was to be shot in Texas. Weintraub had produced Bruce Lee's *Enter the Dragon* and this was to be a similar international 'breakout' film for Jackie. The analogy with Bruce Lee extends to the choice of Robert Clouse as director and is underlined at the level of distribution by GH's decision to re-release all their Bruce Lee films through Columbia in the United States and EMI in Europe. *Variety* described this strategy as 'designed to pave the way for a breakout of some of Chow's other Chinese product from their normally parochial oriental playoff orbit'.[28] Although the parochialism with which the Hong Kong industry is charged is more easily explicable as the condescension with which American critics regarded popular Hong Kong genres, GH quickly fell in with the idea that if it hoped to introduce any form of popular Asian film, it would have to appeal to pre-existent international models of Asian cinema. These had either become outdated or they could not be transferred to new stars. The failure of several hesitant attempts to popularise Jackie Chan (in *The Big Brawl* and *The Protector*) and Michael Hui (teamed with Jackie in *Cannonball Run*, where

they billed 11th and 12th) spelled the end of GH's attempts to export their local stars for global consumption. Henceforth, regional production and global production would be kept strictly separate.

If GH's aim was to become a global production major, it faltered quickly. By Cannes 1980, the total international production budget had been held steady at US$60 million, but in the climate of rapidly inflating production costs, it was recognised that this would make fewer films and the company was now talking in terms of four to five international films per year (projected at US$15 million each).[29] By Cannes 1983, however, GH had only two international projects current, and their efforts to break into western markets were largely suspended until the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* series at the end of the decade.[30]

In discussing the failure of the ambitions of 1979, a number of factors must be taken into account. Because GH relied so heavily on its own funding, it pre-sold for many territories as a source of bridging liquidity, but this was peripheral to the issue at the heart of global marketing – North American distribution. Tom Gray, the new vice-president in charge of international sales put it this way: 'Obviously we're looking for money, but more importantly we're looking to establish continuing relationships with important distributors in all major markets to give us a long-term advantage.'[31]

A major factor in GH's lack of global success was its failure at achieving this aim of a stable relationship with a major North American distributor. Instead it stumbled through a series of unsatisfactory short-term associations with US distributors. The Bruce Lee films had initially been distributed by National General, a fledgling distributor no longer active. Fox had handled the failed US release of *The Man from Hong Kong* to the great displeasure of GH which switched to Columbia to handle the Bruce Lee re-issues. By the time GH's big-budget international films were coming on line, GH had shifted back to Fox, who handled the American release of *Cannonball Run*, *The Big Brawl* and *Megaforce*. Of these, the first was a sizeable hit, finishing eighth on *Variety*'s 1981 rentals list with distributor rentals of US$35.4 million in North America. *Megaforce*, however, was a fiasco. Its production budget exceeded that of *Cannonball Run* by US$5, though it did negligible box office. In October, 1982, GH moved its distribution back to Warners amid reports of their unhappiness with Fox's handling of *Megaforce*.[32] Much has been written on the way the Paramount Decrees broke up vertical integration, but left the majors in a dominant position as distributors.[33] GH could not afford to establish its own North American distribution network, and was continually disgruntled with its US distributors who saw GH's films as marginal.

Another major factor which militated against GH's expansion into America involved international currency markets. At the start of the 1980s the Hong Kong dollar traded at around 5.5 to the US dollar. The early 80s saw a strengthening of the US currency, especially against the Hong Kong dollar which dropped sharply, driven by fears of 1997. By mid-1983, the

Hong Kong dollar was at a rate of 8.2 to the US dollar.[34] Added to the already escalating costs of production in the United States, this was a devaluation of over 30 per cent in GH's Hong Kong capital assets. In essence, GH found itself committed to paying for increasingly expensive international production at a time when it should have been offering itself as a site for cheap offshore filmmaking.

Not only did western production become more expensive, but GH's international returns were also adversely affected. In the 1970s, significant revenues had come from Asia and South America where GH successfully controlled its own distribution. It was precisely these markets which were most heavily depressed by the strong US dollar and mounting levels of international debt. While Asian returns declined, the Latin American market virtually collapsed. Gray was reported as saying that where a film might previously have yielded US$200,000 'in hard currency' in a single South American country, that figure had dropped to US$30–40,000 often accompanied by restrictions on taking money out of the country.[35]

A final factor was the choice of films around which GH based its push into the global scene. Of the six films in the 1979 package, there were severe problems with two. *Arctic Rampage* (later released under the title of *Death Hunt*) was delayed due to the sacking of director Robert Aldrich by Albert Ruddy. Aldrich claimed that the reason for his removal was that Ruddy insisted that the budget be cut from US$18 million to US$10 million.[36] Aldrich was a victim of escalating production costs and a diminished HK currency, as GH tried to rein in costs. At this early point in its attempts to access western markets, GH needed to offer a regular supply of new releases to strengthen its hand with distributors. It made several pickups such as Roger Vadim's *Night Games* and Alan Bridges' *Return of the Soldier* but the market for these small scale films was not favourable. The lesson was that a stream of medium- and low-budget films was no substitute for big-budget films in the new, blockbuster-driven market.

The second troublesome production was also instructive. *The Texans* was to be produced by Ruddy and directed by Sam Peckinpah from a John Milius script. With Peckinpah's death early in 1981, Hal Needham was announced as replacement, but when he took over Ruddy's other major project, *Megaforce*, *The Texans* lapsed altogether. Ruddy and Needham had just collaborated on *Cannonball Run*, and on the basis of this, both became entrenched as staples of GH production, just as Clouse and Weintraub became staples after *Enter the Dragon*.

In retrospect, GH's creative strategies were clearly limited. The company established a relationship with Ruddy but was then unable or unwilling to go beyond this. Their only significant success came with *Cannonball Run*, which was, even then, a highly derivative film whose commercial appeal was its ensemble of older stars. (Burt Reynolds, who had been a number one box office star in the United States through the late 1970s, commanded a US$5 million salary out of the US$13 million budget.[37]) In adopting a policy

emphasising the position of stars, GH was emulating a strategy that had worked well for it domestically, but this proved unwieldy in the western markets. The stars they chose tended to be past their peak (Burt Reynolds, Roger Moore, Dean Martin, Sammy Davis Jr in *Cannonball Run*, David Niven in the 1982 failure *Better Late than Never*) or associated with television, such as Farrah Fawcett (*Cannonball Run*) and Tom Selleck, who was featured in *High Road to China* and *Lassiter*, both shot in Europe to avoid the high costs of American production.

Conclusions

The Golden Harvest case study demonstrates the international importance of the North American film market and gives an example of the types of problems faced by those who try to transform national or regional cinemas into centres of global production by accessing that market. GH was not an isolated example, as aspiring mini-majors such as Cannon, De Laurentiis, Orion and Carolco all experienced variations on this story during this period. All had moments of success, though in retrospect, these became the exceptions which encouraged them on to failure. To return to my initial focus, I would argue that this case study lays out many of the pitfalls which continue to lie in the path of Asian filmmakers who might have ambitions to globalise on the basis of isolated successes.

The failure of GH's global ambitions can be attributed to a number of enduring factors. These include the undiminished dominance of US distribution majors as the sole options possessing global distribution reach, with companies such as Disney and Columbia still playing major roles in the flow of Asian films to global markets. Also relevant is the tendency of the United States to replace overseas niche successes with domestic versions, both in the commercial mainstream with films such as *The Matrix* and in the art cinema where what I will call the Sundance effect has led to a re-Americanisation of international art cinema. The escalation of production costs as a means by which major producers curtail competition, the preference for an ever-decreasing number of blockbusters in preference to medium-budget films, and the fluctuations of international currencies are all still factors which must be taken into account in assessing the chances for breakout production centred on East Asia.

This study has dealt with the industrial history rather than critical textual evaluation. Thus far, I have had little or nothing to say about the aesthetic worth of the films made by GH in their attempts at global production. In their attempts at replicating rather conservative models of western production, using a small number of international personnel with whom they felt comfortable, most of these films represented unhappy compromises. Although films such as *The Touch* or *The Medallion* now showcase Hong Kong stars rather than contemporary equivalents of Tom Selleck and Burt Reynolds, they still raise questions about how much has changed in the

intervening years. After the initial successes of the kung fu films which culminated in 1973, GH separated domestic/regional and global production and never found a way to bring them together again. Aside from the industrial issues raised in this essay, a vital issue for contemporary Hong Kong filmmakers with global ambitions concerns the ways in compromises can be found to successfully combine domestic, regional and global appeals.

12 Distant screens

Film festivals and the global projection of Hong Kong cinema

Cindy Hing-Yuk Wong

Hong Kong cinema has always been an international cinema. Since its inception around the 1920s, with distribution networks throughout China, Southeast Asia, the Far East, and the Chinese diaspora, its films and personnel have moved through networks of global Chinese, drawing on resources – material and financial – from within these worlds. In this essay, however, I move outside these worlds to investigate the connections between Hong Kong cinema and international film festivals. More specifically, I am interested in how Hong Kong filmmakers have, over the years, progressively used international film festivals to showcase their works and to market them globally. At the same time, I am also interested in the ways film festival circuits have influenced the distribution, consumption and reception of Hong Kong films around the world. The success of Jackie Chan, John Woo, Ann Hui and Wong Kar-wai have made Hong Kong films global enough to be appropriated by Hollywood in various ways as popular entertainment. Yet for Hong Kong filmmakers, these festival circuits represent crucial points of access to both global film markets and artistic recognition – a conduit through which their films find and gain Western spectatorships.

In this essay, I thus explore how Hong Kong films and related traditions *become known* globally through international film festivals, especially those located in Europe – most particularly, the 'A-level' festivals of Cannes, Berlin, Venice and Locarno. Film festivals first emerged in early twentieth-century Europe as national celebrations of film cultures and associated media industries. They have since expanded to become truly global events in terms of product variety, participants and clientele. These older primary festivals have set the model for contemporary film festivals which have defined themselves by their film selections, market specialisations, distinctive audiences and juries comprised of varied media professionals. Whether hosted in cities, neighbourhoods or villages, these intense days of screenings, interactions and negotiations reflect local identities, regional and national cultures, encourage international exchanges of films, and cultivate the social construction of taste for global films.[1] Despite the globalisation of film festivals, however, Europe retains the dominant gaze within this circuit; indeed, the designation – 'A-Level' festivals – is supplied by the FIAPF (the

International Federation of Film Producers Association), another European entity that sees itself as the ultimate arbiter of cinematic taste.

Film festivals, through their power to select and showcase particular films that highlight cultural themes and film histories, create knowledge and debates, in turn raising interesting questions about varieties of spectatorship, and about film as art and commercial product. My work also recognises that Europe, through its various film festivals, brings global attention to contemporary Hong Kong films, catching the eye of international producers and distributors, including those of Hollywood. In addition, through personal and programming relations to the European festival film circuits, the Hong Kong International Film Festival has helped promote Hong Kong cinema abroad. Film festivals thus provide a unique vantage point from which to examine the cultural politics in the international film arena vis-à-vis both Hollywood and what Western Europeans tend to call the 'South', a telling label that lumps together multiple cultures and film industries of non-Western and developing worlds.

Hong Kong film and filmmakers' participation in these festivals (and elsewhere) is also a vital industrial strategy. Hong Kong films are often taken to be somewhat different and 'refreshing' – a view shared by festival organisers, critics or audiences in Europe, whether Cannes, Berlin, Venice or Locarno. This is a selective vision manipulated by Hong Kong filmmakers and global critics alike. Yet, this vision itself entails reading specific films, aesthetics, themes and filmmakers as representatives of Hong Kong film culture, rather than simply viewing commercially popular films.

It is also crucial to weigh Hong Kong cinema against other Chinese language films and other Asian films on the global film stage. This relationship evokes issues of Hong Kong identities in film, those constructed locally and perceived globally, and related civic matters. Following Callahan,[2] reading Hong Kong through film festivals will allow us to understand the territory's connections with global Chinese discourses, including Hong Kong's relations to China in turbulent times, the transnationality of Hong Kong films in terms of casting and finances, and Hong Kong's on-going presence on Nanyang (that is, Southeast Asian) screens for nearly a century now. Moreover, the thematics of Hong Kong films in these festivals raise other questions about how Hong Kong and Chineseness are perceived. At various points, for example, *wuxia* (martial arts) films, costume dramas, 1980s New Wave works, Ann Hui's diverse corpus, John Woo's hero films and Wong Kar-Wai's auteur cinema have all been taken to stand for the complex cinemas of Hong Kong and for even wider Chinese cinemas.

This essay uses data from Cannes, Venice, Berlin and Locarno,[3] drawn from historical accounts, interviews, websites and participant observations, so as to understand the ways Hong Kong films have been selected for screening and competition and the implications of this evolution. I shall arrange these data in roughly chronological periodisations – 'Origin and Growth (1940s–1960s), 'After the 60s', 'The 1980s: Going Global', and 'the

Golden Age of the 1990s' – both to structure historical examination and to analyze themes of film interpretation. This project forms part of my larger research project on global film festivals and the production of knowledge and identity-formation within the public sphere of the festival world.

I also recognise important variations among these festivals. The highly visible Cannes festival remains the most important annual film-event for filmmakers to showcase their work. It has long been a crucial outlet for Hong Kong films seeking global attention and distribution. Venice, the oldest film festival, rewarded Japan as an Axis Power in 1938 when it was Mussolini's showcase; the film *Gonin no Sekkohei* was nominated to compete for the Mussolini Cup. Sixty-one years later, in 1989, Venice became the first European film festival to give its top prize to a Chinese language film, Hou Hsiao-Hsien's *City of Sadness* (1989), which received the Golden Lion. Berlin, also called the Berlinale, though relatively younger, has turned out to be the most important festival in helping to globalise Hong Kong cinema. Ulrich Gregor and Erika Gregor, the programmers for the Berlin's Forum between 1970 and 2000, were known to seek out Hong Kong films aggressively: in the late 1980s, some 85 Hong Kong films were shown there. Meanwhile, the more intimate and experimental Locarno festival gave Clara Law's *Autumn Moon* its 1992 Golden Leopard, and has since showcased Hong Kong films regularly.[4]

Europe also hosts many other more diverse and smaller film festivals, each serving different specialised audiences and objectives – for example, the now-defunct fantasy festival at Avoriaz in France. According to critic Jean-Marc Micciche, this festival focused on 'non kung-fu' Hong Kong cinema; after operating for two decades, it closed in 1993. Its successor, Fantastic'Arts in the French town of Gérardmer, granted an award to Ronny Yu Yan-Tai's *Bride with White Hair* (Jiang-Hu) in 1994. Other small French festivals at Deauville and the Festival des Trois Continents at Nantes have specialised in cinemas from Asia, Africa and Latin and Black America. *Rouge* (Stanley Kwan 1987) and *Made in Hong Kong* (Fruit Chan 1997) both won Montgolfière d'Or awards at the latter festival. Among the many festivals outside Europe, Toronto, with the late maverick programmer, David Overbey, also provided an important platform for the international career of some Hong Kong filmmakers, for example, John Woo and Wong Kar-wai.

Film festivals also change their emphases and selections from year to year, sometimes with an awareness of global fashions like Iranian cinema, Korean cinema or Hong Kong style, all in competition for novelty and avant-garde status. These changes may reflect the shifting fortunes of film industries – a good or bad year for French, Hollywood or Hong Kong films – as well as larger political, economic and social issues. When Wong Kar-wai's *2046* lost to Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* at Cannes in 2004, many read it as a symbolic rebuke of American foreign policy at the time. Wong, however, was selected to preside over the jury for Cannes 2006.

Hence, while emphasising specific festivals as examples, I do not want to overlook their shared elements and their meaning within a system of filmic significations. Across these festivals, cinematic tastes and cultural meanings – in regards to particular film industries, movements or cycles and also in respect to what constitute categories of 'art', 'high culture', 'breakthroughs', or 'mass success' – continue to be hotly debated among programmers, critics, audiences and buyers. These debates, in turn, inform selections and programming. With regard to Hong Kong cinema, key debates revolve around matters of art versus mass cinema, popular masters versus newcomers, outsiders or auteurs, and period pieces versus hypermodernity. Hence, in reading the 'creation' of Hong Kong, I have drawn on Bourdieu's discussions of the cultural construction of taste,[5] Gupta and Ferguson's perspectives on space, mobility and globalism[6] and critical reformulations of the meaning of local and global public spheres.[7]

Origins and growth: looking at Asia from the 1940s to the 1960s

Shortly after World War II, two Hong Kong films, *Qinggong Mishi* (*Secret Life of the Qing Court*, 1948) and *Sons of the Earth* (1952), both directed by Zhu Shilin of the left-leaning Long Wa/Yong Hua Studio, were shown in Locarno. In 1958, actor Kwan Shan won a Best Actor award at that same festival for his role in Great Wall Studio's *The Story of Ah Q*. After that, no Hong Kong films appeared at Locarno until Tang Shu Shuen's *The Arch* (1969). Like its forerunners, *The Arch* was regarded as a 'serious' Mandarin film that stood apart from the run-of-the-mill commercial fare Hong Kong generally offered. In this regard, Locarno, though a much smaller festival relative to Cannes, Venice and Berlin, would count as the first to take an interest in postwar Hong Kong films. Still, unlike Japanese and Indian cinemas, which had auteurs like Akira Kurosawa and Satyajit Ray, Hong Kong did not receive similar accolades.

Yet, these cases remind us that auteurs are not enough: recognition in festivals demanded strategic actions as well. While Japan had won a prize in the Axis-dominated Venice film festival of 1938, post-war Japan sought more ways to redevelop its movies' overseas market. Cannes extended its invitation in 1951, but due to financial restraints, Japan only managed to send a short subject film, *The Life of Rice*. Giulliana Stramigioli, a representative from the Venice film festival, also asked for a Japanese entry; she liked *Rashomon* because of its 'strangeness'.[8] After *Rashomon*'s surprising success in Venice, where it won the Grand Prize in 1951 (and then at the Oscars, where it won best foreign language film in 1952), Japanese films became a common feature at Venice, with Japanese jurors beginning to make appearances at Cannes, Berlin and Venice. At Cannes, Kasaburo Yoshimura's *Genji Monogatari* – one of three Japanese films shown in 1952 – won the prize for photography, with Kinugasa's *Jigoku-Mon* (*Gates of Hell*) winning the festival's Grand Prize two years later.

The Indian film *Neecha Nagar* was part of Cannes' inauguration in 1947; thereafter, shorts and feature-length films from South Asia were frequent selections. Cannes' selections generally favoured Indian 'art' films over the commercial fare from Bollywood. A number won technical prizes from time to time, with Satyajit Ray's debut, *Pather Panchali*, walking away with the Human Document Award in 1956. The next year, Ray's *Aparajito* won the Golden Lion at Berlin. By that time, Indian film entries as well as Indian jurors were also becoming well known in Europe's festival circuits. During this period, films from other parts of Asia had relatively limited exposure.

Meanwhile, in the Far East, in an endeavour to create an Asian equivalent to Venice and Cannes, Japanese studios founded the Asian Film Festival in 1954, with other film industries in the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Hong Kong and Taiwan.[9] The Asian Film Festival, being an industry sponsored event, however, resembled the American Oscars more than Cannes; it was primarily a public relations event for the industries. It finally ended in 1969.

The Japanese studios that were actively in contact with European festivals also collaborated frequently with the Shaw Brothers studios, including a Japanese remake of *Princess Yang Kwei Fei* (1955) by Kenji Mizoguchi. This international network helps explain how Shaw managed to send three Li Han-hsiang movies to Cannes in the early sixties. Li joined Shaw in 1955; he specialised in high budget period dramas like *The Enchanted Shadow* (1960), which appeared in Cannes that year. This was followed by his *Yang Kwei Fei* (1962) and *Empress Wu* (1963). None won major prizes although *Yang Kwei Fei* was awarded the Grand Prix of the Commission Supérieure technique du Cinéma Français. These Shaw Brothers films, however, had been entered as contributions from *Chine*, without specifying which China.

Cannes' growing interest in Hong Kong cinema since the 1980s raises interesting questions about what has constituted Chinese entries. The representation of China through Mandarin language films made in Hong Kong, in the absence of other Chinese films, suggests that issues of national status were at play on the path to international recognition. Cannes has continued to maintain economic and cultural relations with the multiple Chinas that have appeared at the festival, as the entries for 2005 showed, with three Chinese language films, one each from the PRC (Wang Xiaoshuai's *Shanghai Dreams*), Taiwan (Hou Hsiao-hsien's *Three Times*), and Hong Kong (Johnny To's *Election*). At the same time, Shaw Brothers films, products of a modernising global Hong Kong, offered relatively high production values and familiar plots, and a safe and historicised other that recalls the period pieces that Japan offered to the European festival world. And interest in 'Asian' films was clearly negotiated between European demands and those few Asian producers able to create and publicise films that would make it in a market dominated by Europe, in counterpoint to Hollywood's strong presence at these events.

After the 1960s

The global turbulence of the late sixties had a strong effect on European film festivals. Cannes temporarily shut down in 1968 amid widespread unrest; Berlin offered no competitive prizes in 1970, and Venice did away with prizes throughout the 1970s. Critics and audiences also demanded that festivals become more inclusive: they saw a need to include more films from Eastern Europe, Latin America, Africa and Asia. In 1969, Cannes reopened, creating a new category called *Quinzaine des Realisateurs* (Directors' Fortnight). According to Maurice Bessy, the then-President of Cannes, this category was designed to encourage participation from lesser-known directors, from all over the world that made innovative films that focused contemporary problems and issues – social or otherwise.[10] Bessy's successor, Gilles Jacob augmented this category with *Un Certain Regard*. Introduced in 1978, *Un Certain Regard* was meant to: 'leav[e] the main freeway of the film competitions, the national notoriety of the super-highways, to take the lesser known roads. These roads are sometimes rough, overgrown and untravelled but they often lead to a wide open clearance'.[11]

Meanwhile in Berlin, the International Forum of Young Cinema (Forum) emerged as a counter event to the Berlinale: it 'aimed to promote films as a platform for cultural exchange and political discussion'.[12] Incorporated into the Festival after 1970, the Forum was the relatively more innovative and experimental branch of the festival.

Despite these changes, the presence of Chinese language films remained limited. This was partly because of the Cultural Revolution and its impact on filmmaking and distribution in the mainland, though the PRC sent in belated entries in 1979 – amongst which was Shei Tiehi's (aka Xie Tieli) *Early Spring* (a film produced in 1963). Prior to this, *Un Certain Regard* had included films from Morocco, Brazil and Finland. In 1975, Hong Kong returned to this circuit with King Hu's *A Touch of Zen* (1971), which was nominated for the Golden Palm. Like the PRC's *Early Spring*, *A Touch of Zen* was an old film by the time it arrived at Cannes. King Hu retained the foreign distribution rights to his film before sending it off to Cannes, which was understood as a gateway to wider distribution. The film was screened under the Hong Kong category rather than *Chine*, the very first time Hong Kong was used as a label for a film's 'nationality'. While it won an award for Superior Technique, the anticipated global distribution never materialised.[13] After this, Cannes received no more film entries from Hong Kong for more than a decade.

In 1975, actress Hsu Feng (aka Xu Feng), who plays the female lead in *A Touch of Zen*, accompanied King Hu to Cannes. The journey turned out to be an important experience for her. As she recalled in a recent interview with J. Dupont of the *International Herald Tribune*, 'the festival was an eye-opener – we saw that a film could be an art form, not just a business', adding that she would some day return to Cannes and win the Palme d'Or, even

though Xu, at the time 'never thought [she] would become a producer'. She then emphasises, 'That happened later, after I quit acting'.[14] As it turned out, she became involved as a producer of *Farewell my Concubine* (1993), a Hong Kong/China entry at Cannes and shared the Palme d'Or with Jane Champion's *The Piano*.

King Hu offered high-production value *wuxia* films that fed France's fascination for historical costume drama, glossed with philosophical discourse. This film also represented a selection within a wider and better-known Hong Kong production, a distinction drawn by the festival between art (or something like it) and mass media/business, emphasised in Serge Daney's 1981 report on Hong Kong for *Cahiers du Cinema*, which highlighted Hu as an auteur.[15]

The late 1970s and 1980s also witnessed a growing general popularity of Hong Kong kung fu films in France, at first via the movies of Bruce Lee, who became a star in *films des quartiers*. Later, as Jean-Marc Micciche notes, the impact of video also increased awareness and valuation of Hong Kong action/mass cinema, a popular consciousness that would grow around France over the next decades. This included specialised journals like *HK Express* and websites like *Hkcinemagic* (1998–) that created multiple discourses about Hong Kong films beyond the smaller festivals that were celebrating this popular as opposed to art cinema. While Micciche saw film festivals as vanguards for theatrical releases, alternative distribution outlets, such as video stores, were also emerging to change the mediascape of France. Within this context, French critic David Aneas observed that

> King Hu made a diptych that cannot be totally link (sic) to the Hong Kong martial arts genre (the way the genre was created by Chang Cheh, Chu Yuan or Liu Chia Liang for instance) but is on the verge of such genre, hence its specificity and its acclamation by the occidental audience. Only King Hu movies were indeed selected for the Cannes Film Festival for instance. The French intelligentsia at the time may have used King Hu as a pretext to ignore the rest of the Hong Kong film production. It's a shame because both King Hu's production and other HK movies eventually suffered from this.[16]

This pattern would change, in a serious way, in the decade ahead through new films, filmmakers and institutions like the Hong Kong International Film Festival (HKIFF).

The 1980s: going global

While Chinese and Hong Kong participation in film festivals remained limited in the 1970s, Hong Kong cinema was also absorbing changes in media landscape that would recreate its relations to global film festivals. In Hong Kong, a new broadcast station, TVB, opened in 1967. As it turned

out, TVB was to become a major employer of a new generation of Hong Kong filmmakers who were trained in the West, primarily England and the United States – for example, Ann Hui, Allen Fong and Tsui Hark. They came back to Hong Kong and started working in the new Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK), whose programmes were broadcast at TVB. Their education in the West had exposed them to film festivals and the European art film circuit. Their ties also helped create audiences there. According to Roger Garcia, for example, Allen Fong received good notices when he screened his RTHK films at the London International Film Festival in the 1970s. Critics like Tony Rayns also promoted Hong Kong films in *Time Out* Magazine in London (Garcia personal communication, 2 June 2005). Meanwhile, elsewhere in Europe, interest in Hong Kong's New Wave was on the rise.

European interest extended to Hong Kong International Film Festival (HKIFF) and other film resources in Hong Kong. Serge Daney of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, for example, attended the HKIFF in 1980. In his article 'Journal de Hong-Kong', he wondered if there was '*une nouvelle vague a HK?*', while simultaneously introducing European audiences to Ann Hui. Other writers for *Cahiers* such as Olivier Assayas and Charles Tesson soon started to report, with increasing frequency, on the 'Hong Kong Connection' as well,[17] alongside their English-language counterparts such as Rayns and Marco Muller (now director of the Venice Film Festival, a critic and festival programmer who has promoted Chinese language films for decades). Meanwhile, Ulrich Gregor of Berlin's Forum learned about Hong Kong's New Wave at the London Film Festival. He also visited the HKIFF, and had the opportunity to watch many Hong Kong products (personal communication, 2005). With increased European interest, Hong Kong thus made further inroads into the European film festival circuit.

One of the first Hong Kong movies to enter the four 'A-Level' festivals in this period was Peter Yung's *Life after Life* in 1982, followed by Allen Fong's *Ah Ying* in 1984. Experimental works like *New Maps of the City* by Roger Garcia and Jim Shum were also shown in the Forum in 1984. Through the network that had been established through the HKIFF, the festival programmers eventually created a wider acceptance of Hong Kong cinema. By 1987, more than eight Hong Kong films found their way to the Berlin Forum – these included films made by John Woo, Ann Hui, Tsui Hark, Stanley Kwan Sui Kai and others. But it was the Toronto Film Festival (Canada) that helped launch the craze for John Woo films – one that was to eventually propel Woo to Hollywood; in this respect, David Overbey, the programmer at the Toronto Film Festival, is often recognised as the 'discoverer' of John Woo, although this is an ethnocentric label.

Similarly, many have suggested that John Woo's success had to do with the return to genre cinema in the 1980s (Jacob Wong, Roger Garcia; personal correspondence 2005). Hollywood was no longer producing edgy films noirs, while European art films seemed stale. Hong Kong genre cinema, on

the other hand, brought back the cinema of the past in magical and refreshing ways. Or as Garcia puts it with specific respect to Woo's films: they 'harked back to a cinema that had largely disappeared from Western screens – pulp noir, Peckinpah violence, simple emotion/big men, sentimentality' (personal correspondence, 2005). Reworking old conventions with great skill, Woo's films were therefore able to move from the narrow film festival circuits to the relatively wider art-house niche circuits where Hollywood eventually appropriated them. Here we see the cultural divide between Hong Kong auteurs who stayed within the film festivals and art houses and those who continued to be 'mainstream'. The division was to become clearer in the 1990s.

Ann Hui, another of Hong Kong's new wave directors, had entered her works in European film festivals as early as the seventies. In 1981, she was invited to a conference in the Berlinale where she screened *The Spooky Bunch* at the Panorama Section. *Cahiers* subsequently filed reports about her and her film activities.[18] Since then, she has consistently been invited to participate at different European film festivals, where she showcases her latest works. She has also served on the juries for Berlin, Venice, and other festivals. More importantly, she has been able to make films consistently throughout her career of more than three decades. Her exposure at film festivals definitely helped her gain international recognition which has, in turn, contributed to her productive career.

During the 1980s, Hong Kong films at these film festivals were diverse, though mostly drawn from the New Wave. They included Allen Fong's 'realist' *Ah Ying*, Tsui Hark's comic-satiric but female-centred *Peking Opera Blues*, Ann Hui's period kung-fu *The Romance of Book and Sword*, John Woo's choreographic mayhem *A Better Tomorrow* and, later in the early 1990s, Wong Kar-wai's *Days of Being Wild*. All of these films, except for Fong's, were mainstream Hong Kong products. Yet, when they arrived at the Forum in Berlin, and subsequently at Toronto, they became 'serious' films with artistic merits. As I have discussed in my other work, the change in contexts of reception, from Hong Kong to the West, from the local mainstream cinemas to film festivals, altered the cultural meaning of these films.[19] In the West, having gained critical recognition from film festival circuits, Hong Kong films became art, even cult, films, appreciated by the select elite few who supposedly knew 'good movies'.

Another redefinition of Hong Kong cinema took place within a redefinition of global Chinese films. After 1979, China started to make connections with the international film arena, with Xie Jin's *Herdsman* (Mu Ma Ren, 1981) and Cen Fan's *True Story of Ah Q* (1981) appearing at Cannes, as did Que Wen's *Night of Ice* (1985). Soon, the innovations of Fifth Generation directors like Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou made wider marks in international film festivals with *Yellow Earth* (1984; Locarno Silver Leopard 1985), *Red Sorghum* (1987; Berlin Golden Bear 1988), and *Hai Zi Wang* (an entry in Cannes official competition in 1988). From across the Strait of

Taiwan, *auteurs* like Hou Hsiao-Hsien and Edward Yang also gained eminence in Europe, with two films from Hou's coming-of-age trilogy winning awards: *A Summer at Grandpa's* (1984; Ecumenical Jury Prize, Locarno 1985) and *A Time to Live and a Time to Die* (1985; Fipresci Berlin). Hou's third instalment, *Dust in the Wind* (1986), was not as well-received, however Yang's *Terrorist* (1986) won the Locarno Silver Leopard in 1987 and was also selected for *Un Certain Regard* at Cannes. Taiwanese director Fred Tan's offering, *Rouge of the North* (1988), also made it to *Un Certain Regard*. In other words, Hong Kong cinema was entering the film festival circuits alongside other Chinese language films. There was, however, a divergence in the kinds of movies and markets these films created in the West: Hong Kong films appeared more oriented to the mainstream Hollywood market, with mainland Chinese films offering a romanticised, orientalised Chineseness, and Taiwan films offering smaller, intimate auteurist works.

This wider vision of new 'Chinese films' was constructed by Western critics but not unsupported by Chinese sources. A recent Chinese web information source, for example, weaves together all the examples I have discussed as a single narrative of Chinese cinema, concluding that 'on the extensive stage that Cannes offers, no effort is spared in showing the world a more real and vivid China'.[20] Whereas in the 1960s, and even 1970s, Hong Kong films had been an alternative to China, by the late 1980s they existed in a close counterpoint with films from China and Taiwan, and perhaps even within a new Asian consciousness around films from Vietnam, Korea and Thailand.

Wide screens: the Golden Age of the 1990s

Because of Hong Kong and Chinese successes in film festivals and wider screenings in the 1980s, director Wong Kar-wai and his works faced receptions very different from those that had greeted John Woo and Tsui Hark. Wong first arrived in Cannes in the 1988 Critic's Week with *As Tears Go By*. Still, when his *Days of Being Wild* appeared at the Berlin Forum in 1991, it did not make a very strong impression. According to Li Cheuk-To, this was largely due to the fact that in that time, Hong Kong cinema was defined by Woo's and Tsui's genre films.[21] Even Toronto's David Overbey, a colleague of Li and enthusiast of Hong Kong cinema, gave Wong little attention at the time.

Wong's major recognition outside Hong Kong came with *Chungking Express* (1994) when it was first screened in competition at Locarno. It then went to Toronto and Stockholm. At the Stockholm Film Festival, Quentin Tarantino, who had just won a Palme d'Or for *Pulp Fiction* at Cannes, was on the jury. Tarantino strongly promoted *Chungking Express* through his networks, contributing to its release in the US art house circuit. This helped establish Wong's growing reputation as a Hong Kong 'art film' director. When *Fallen Angels* was shown in the Berlin Forum, and then Toronto, it

was picked up for distribution in London. Critics, including Tony Rayns of *Sight and Sound*, gave the film front page coverage.

Nonetheless, to really be inducted into the ranks of world masters, Wong had to triumph at Cannes. With great promotional efforts, *Happy Together* (1997) was selected as a Hong Kong film entry for Cannes during the territory's last months of British colonial administration. Wong won the Best Director Award. According to Li, as an Asian film on homosexuality, the film would garner greater interest from Western critics and audiences. With this success at Cannes, Wong not only established his credentials but was also able to move beyond the film festival circuits. His subsequent works, *In the Mood for Love* (2001) and *2046* (2004), also made appearances at Cannes; yet, they came with pre-sold distribution rights for art house and DVD releases in the West.

Here, it is useful to contrast Wong with John Woo. Even though Woo had become a known figure at film festivals by the late 1980s, and had served on the Jury for Cannes in 2005, he was still considered to be a director with mass appeal, which also translated into much bigger budget and revenue. Woo chose to move to Hollywood rather than staying in Hong Kong, making better financed movies with Hollywood stars for global mass distribution. His Hollywood films are not the typical artistic festival films Cannes seeks. On the other hand, Wong continues to make his films without a script, rushing *2046* to Cannes at the very last minute, to the point of cancelling a press screening. He fits the proscriptive role of a 'true artist'. In many ways, the careers of these two directors show us how the tension between so called art and commerce has been negotiated within the film festival circuit, and how both, nonetheless, could use film festivals to promote their careers in very different directions.

The definition of Hong Kong art film in this period remained closely linked to a wider vision of Chineseness in both space and production. Wong Kar-wai's debut film, *As Tears Go By*, dealt with overseas Chinese. In 1990, Ann Hui's *Song of Exile* (again, about Chinese displacement) was included as a Taiwan entry for *Un Certain Regard*, in the wake of the political and cultural shocks that ensued from the Tiananmen event in the summer of 1989.

Hong Kong cinema also reached its most prolific period in the mid-eighties, paving the way for more exposure in individual festivals within the circuit in the 1990s. In Berlin, the Forum continued to be a showplace for Hong Kong cinema. After Wong Kar Wai's *Days of Being Wild* (1991) and King Hu's *Swordsman* (1990), the 'Chinese' presence continued to be strong. Sylvia Chang, Hsu Fong, Ann Hui, Maggie Cheung, Michelle Yeoh and Li Cheuk-To (HKIFF) were all invited to serve on the Jury for Berlin in different years. During this period, Maggie Cheung and Josephine Hsiao won the Best Actress awards at Berlin for Stanley Kwan's *Center Stage* and Ann Hui's *Summer Snow*, respectively. Meanwhile, the works of Tsui Hark, Yao Fan, Sammo Hung, Ann Hui and other Hong Kong filmmakers continued to be shown at the Forum.

In Cannes, Chen Kaige's *Farewell my Concubine* (1993) won the Palme d'Or. Even though it was listed as a Hong Kong/China film, Chen is clearly a mainland director. While Hong Kong actors and other figures are involved in these projects, one of the most notable yet invisible presences is Hong Kong money, a critical infrastructural element of new Chinese identity in film productions. Other Chinese and Taiwanese auteurs, like Zhang Yimou, Chen Kaige, Tsai Mingliang and Hou Hsiao-hsien had films in official competition in Cannes all through the 1990s. Although Hong Kong was more defined by Wong Kar-Wai by now, Nelson Yu's *Love will Tear us Apart* was also in competition in 1999.

At this time in Locarno, Marco Muller, who has a deep knowledge of Chinese cinema, took over the festival programming, with Chinese language films often in competitive categories, including Clara Law's *Autumn Moon* (1992) which won the Golden Leopard, and Wong Kar-Wai's *Chungking Express* (1994). Venice, on the other hand, saw little Hong Kong presence until Fruit Chan's *Durian Durian* (2000) and Clara Law's *Goddess of 1967* (2000), which was actually an Australian entry. This notwithstanding, other Chinese language cinemas often had walked away with the Golden Lion, starting with Hou Hsiao-Hsien's *City of Sadness* (1989); followed by Zhang Yimou's *Qiu Ju da Guan Si* (1992 Golden Lion), Tsai Ming-Liang's *Vive l'Amore* (1994 Golden Lion) and Zhang Yimou's *Not One Less* (1999 Golden Lion). Chinese language cinema has definitely made its presence felt in the main competition sections in these 'A-level' festival circuits, which has both aided and limited Hong Kong. All these coincided with the ever increased openness of Mainland China.

Hong Kong's festival presence in this period became intertwined with the globalisation of more popular Hong Kong Cinema. 1996, for example, saw the US nationwide release of *Rumble in the Bronx*, *Broken Arrow*, and *Chungking Express*. The first was a Hong Kong mass market film, with an English version that was partially dubbed (although maintaining Jackie Chan's accented English). The film also was edited to appeal to the American market. That same year, John Woo made *Broken Arrow* in Hollywood, a film completely divorced from Hong Kong except for the origin of the director. Finally, Wong's *Chungking Express* (1994, released in the United States in 1996) was one of the first Hong Kong films to gain widespread art house distribution. In contrast to works of the Chinese Fifth generations, it is urban and post-modern, rather than traditional and exotic.

Both the synergy of multiple Chinese films (with cross-over actors, producers and directors) and the expectations raised by continual awards produced a new categorisation of not only Chinese but also Asian films. A report in *Time International* (Summer 1996), for example, celebrated the triumphs of Chinese filmmakers and stars, on and off-stage, at Cannes, thus:

> This year Cannes gave Asian films a yellow light: a signal of caution that a decade of artistic achievement and critical success may be waning. Yet

the failure of *Temptress Moon* or *Goodbye South, Goodbye* to win a prize at the world's leading film festival means much less, practically speaking, than the box-office tally for films by Jackie Chan and John Woo, or the Hollywood interest in Ang Lee and Chow Yun-Fat. Perhaps it is not Chen or Hou who failed to seize the day, but Cannes that failed to see how Asian cinema – in its bustle and ambition, its commandeering of the worldwide market – has reached high noon.[22]

Hong Kong cinema and the new millennium

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Hong Kong film industry slumped. Yet, its participation in film festivals continued. Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) became a true representative of a collaboratively made Chinese movie, recruiting talents and finance from China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, with an American writer and executive producer, James Schamus of Good Machine. The film was shown at Cannes out of competition. Such a screening, while it offers no prizes, is a major launching pad for global mass distribution. Other Chinese language films, however, were prominent in the competitive categories that year, with Tony Leung winning the Best Actor award for his role in Wong Kar-Wai's *In the Mood for Love*. At the same time, Stanley Kwan's *Lan Yu* was chosen for *Un Certain Regard*. The following year, Wong Kar-Wai gave a Master class at Leçon de Cinema. In 2004, Johnnie To's *Breaking News* was shown out of competition. While Wong's *2046* lost to Moore's *Fahrenheit 911*, Maggie Cheung won the Best Actress award for a French film, *Clean*, directed by Olivier Assayas, Cheung's ex-husband and a long-time friend of Hong Kong cinema since his days at *Cahiers* in the 1980s.

In 2005, all three Chinas again were represented in Cannes's official competition, with Hou's *3 Stories*, To's *Election*, and Wang Xiaoshuai's *Shanghai Dreams*, which won the Prix de Jury. In terms of jurors, Chinese film luminaries continued to have a prominent presence at Cannes: Edward Yang (2001), Michelle Yeoh (2002), Wen Jiang (2003), Tsui Hark (2004), John Woo (2005) and Zhang Ziyi (2006), with Wong as president.

In Venice, Fruit Chan's *Hong Kong Hollywood* and Lai Miu-Suet's *Floating Landscape* were in competition in 2001and 2003, respectively, while Tsai and Hou continued to compete for the Golden Lion. Tsui Hark's new film *Seven Swords* opened the Venice Film Festival of September 2005. Meanwhile Christoph Terhechte, the new director of the Berlin Forum, continues to give support Hong Kong cinema; Johnnie To's films have been a regular feature there since 2000. In 2004, the *Internal Affairs* trilogy was shown, alongside Ann Hui's *Goddess of Mercy* and Derek Yue's *Lost in Time*. These relatively more mainstream genre movies from Hong Kong were programmed in its non-competitive Panorama section. In 2005, the Panorama invited more alternative Hong Kong works such as Fruit Chan's *Dumplings* and Yonfan's *Colour Blossom*. In competition, meanwhile, were

Gu Changwei's *Peacock* (a mainland production) and Tsai Ming Liang's *The Wayward Cloud* (a Taiwanese production) which won the Silver Bear and the Alfred-Bauer Prize, respectively. One might note, however, that other Asian films, especially art films from Korea, have also emerged to challenge Chinese dominance. Still, in Locarno, Fruit Chan continued to win prizes with *Little Cheung*, while the animation *McDull* was also in competition and Nelson Ng sat on the jury in 2004.

The new millennium has been described as a period of crisis for Hong Kong mass cinema, with productions dropping to less than one hundred per year. Yet, at the same time, Hong Kong has gained new success within a range of Greater Chinese screenings, at major European festivals. While Hong Kong's mass market films, then, risk losing overseas markets, these more 'artistic' films may, in fact, be creating one. To understand this, however, we must close with a few notes on film festivals and business.

While film festivals have always been about *auteurs*, artistic innovations, and recognising new talents, major film festivals like Cannes are also about business. This brings national production and international discovery into contact with global and regional distribution as well as Hollywood, which films still take home the majority of the box-office receipts in every European national film market. Hollywood uses these festivals to present itself as more than mass entertainment as well as press junkets for its European distribution.

It is worth contrasting Hollywood's fanfare with Hong Kong's presence as reported by *Asiaweek* in 2001which highlighted Hong Kong film industry struggles and production reforms.[23] Hong Kong's colonial government offered little incentive in helping Hong Kong films get into film festivals in the 1970s and 1980s. In 2001, Hong Kong offered only one film in formal screenings, Stanley Kwan's *Lan Yu* in *Un Certain Regard*, but the Hong Kong Trade Development Council (TDC), Television and Entertainment Licensing Authority and Hong Kong Tourism Board saw Cannes as an ideal platform to capitalise on attention and promote 'The City of Life: Hong Kong is It!' campaign and other events and festivals ahead. The Hong Kong Pavilion hosted 12 Hong Kong film companies and 220 delegates and screened 17 films as well as holding a gala Hong Kong night, with Andy Lau, Sammo Hung, Tsui Hark, Peter Chan and Fruit Chan in attendance.[24] The pavilion also offered a history of Hong Kong films and its global recognition, including not only early Hong Kong silent film but also Hollywood's 1960 *The World of Suzie Wong* as an international vision of the city. Some filmmakers, though, believed that the event was more about Hong Kong tourism than Hong Kong cinema, highlighting the differences between the TDC and film communities. In Berlin, the TDC has been hosting gala parties as such for the last few years. It has become clear that the Hong Kong government has increasingly recognised the trade potential of this industry. Besides government efforts, art house dealers and distributors – Fortissimo, Celluloid Dreams, Wild Bunch – also have been instrumental in promoting

Hong Kong cinema beyond film festivals; however, most deals are struck at the markets attached to major film festivals.

This sales boom followed on the 2000 awards, where Chinese and diasporic films won grand prize for *Guizi Lai Le* (PRC), awards for best actor and cinematography for Hong Kong-based figures (Tony Leung and Christopher Doyle in *In the Mood for Love*, respectively) and best director for Taiwan's Edward Yang. This trifecta, in turn, relied on long-term efforts by publicists working collectively for all three films who understood the global value of converging endorsements as well as highlighting growing presence and respect that Hong Kong and Chinese films had gained at Cannes through the 1990s. Such investment in the success of a film industry, as well as success in achieving critical recognition and mass distribution means that festival Hong Kong – linked to other Chinese productions and co-productions – resembles national cultural industries like Hollywood, France or Japan more than it does the Third World producers who provide depth and variety to major festivals.

Both the awards and the extra presentations of the Hong Kong pavilion, alongside issues of co-productions, mobile stars and locales, have solidified the role of Hong Kong at Cannes as a sometimes contested vanguard of Chinese and Asian film. Through these channels, an identification of alternate Chinese filmic sensibilities has emerged, different from Hollywood and Europe but accessible to distributors who will sign contracts at Cannes for global theatres. Even the integration of public relations firms working for films like the 2000 triumvirate conveyed this sense to spectators: global Chinese making globally-read films. Yet, this remains a 'construction' of Hong Kong film, involving selection and interpretation as well as screening and prizes. In this regard, by reading Hong Kong through the prism of these four European film festivals, we can understand the complexities and even contradictions of global film knowledge as process – and as a process not only rooted in the past but also going on, each year, with intense effort and interest among multiple agents (in the social science and film business sense of that word).

Conclusions

Yet, this is not the point to start a new story, so much as to reflect on what this connected history of Hong Kong cinema and European film festivals tells about different and wider experiences of film festivals and the categorisations imposed on (and created by) Hong Kong. This review of history, connections and interpretations underscores the multiple processes in which festivals, directors, critics, distributors, producers and academics participate as creators as well as observers of global Hong Kong. It is also possible to draw some larger conclusions that can integrate these observations even more with Hong Kong and global film studies.

First, the study of film festivals makes it clear that one cannot fully

understand the place of Hong Kong cinema without situating it in connection to Chinese language films, or other Asia films that circulate in the festival circuits. It is impossible to set a rigid boundary of Hong Kong cinema, be it in terms of thematics, personalities or financial arrangements. Moreover, Hong Kong identities are intricately embedded in negotiation with Chinese identity, and a more broadly defined Asian identity within a system of meaning and practice predicated on relations among different cultures and regions in the global festival circuit.

Nonetheless, film festivals have helped reify distinctions of place, especially when they correlate with perceptions of difference between art and popular culture, no matter how arbitrary the distinction can be. King Hu and Wong Kar-wai were in competition at Cannes, while Bruce Lee and Ringo Lam were on the street or only at the parties, with John Woo only in the juries, and Ann Hui somewhere in-between. While Hollywood quality films, from *All about Eve* to *Shrek*, could be in competition and win prizes, Hong Kong mass production is obviously considered less 'artistic' than Hollywood mass production, another construction of difference by the practices of Cannes, and to a lesser extent the festival world.

Finally, while Hong Kong, and to a larger extent, Chinese and Asian film workers could not totally control their image at Cannes, they have never been passive recipients of success or failure, but have participated fully in exploiting what international recognition in the festival circuit could do for them, from financing to production, from promotion and distribution. Often, despite their growing success, they face contradictory outcomes – a truly global recognition or a drive to make their work more festival-friendly. Thus, Hong Kong films and filmmakers lose some of the specificities grounded in Hong Kong cinema's relationship to its peoples and cultures, or both. Here, distant screens reflect, and shape, those of Hong Kong cinema and vice versa, in the past and the future.

13 Competing regions

The chromatics of the urban fix

Stephanie Hemelryk Donald and John Gammack

> Anyone using the Hong Kong brand must understand and appreciate what the brand represents as well as the power behind its name and symbol.
> (Communicating Hong Kong, 2004)[1]

> Historically, the brand name was a mark of ownership intended to create trust in the consumer as a guarantor of the quality of particular products.
> (Lury 2005)[2]

Introduction

This chapter contributes what might be seen as a discussion tangential to the main theme of film and globalisation in Hong Kong. It discusses cinema in the context of place branding, and investigates the ways in which film and, especially, the chromatic and topographical features of film art contribute to city identity. Although branding may seem a long way from the creative intricacies of cinema, we argue here that an analysis of a city brand can sometimes illuminate the character of urban film. Branding is, as the statements above suggest, about intelligent mechanisms for constructing and maintaining control and profile in a particular market. Film is (partly) about telling compelling stories in evocative locations, and is also about speaking to a particular cultural market sector. Branding is limited by its generic requirements; to provide clear protocols of image and text for engaging the world of tourism, investment and urban development. Film also has a limited narrational span. Film-makers therefore use complex aesthetic and narrative strategies to elaborate both time and space in order to suggest place and duration. These strategies converge with those deployed by branding experts, especially in city contexts. It is these points of similarity that we suggest here.

The chapter is not interested in merely demonstrating convergent methods, however. It aims to show that mutuality between these sectors might provide a basis to make a wider case for regional competition in branding and film. In other words, we are arguing for regions such as Oceania and Asia to assert their (urban) identities through film and marketing campaigns

in order to compete with and complement the strong global brands of Europe and the United States. This is not simply an economic imperative, but rather a spatial tactic in a broader game of global balance, and cultural flow. One might even dare to argue that a re-versioned world spatial economy, fashioned through cultural production as much as in the political sphere, would move us towards a more amicable planet.

Having made such an ambitious and idealistic ambit claim, we address the issue of the spatial imaginaries of culture through micro-studies of film and social research methodologies, which we have used in this study. We have elicited primary, visual responses to place and spatiality from a statistically relevant sample of residents and visitors to world cities in the West Pacific. Respondents were first asked to make a pictorial two-dimensional representation of 'the city'. Samples of this have been discussed elsewhere in relation to Sydney.[3] In brief, we found that this exercise demonstrated a touristic and pragmatic cartographic literacy in our respondents. All drew simple diagrammatic images of a highly legible spatial arrangement, organised around iconic city venues, and often with 'stick' people gathered in sites of important activity (the shoreline, the road, the airport, the harbour side). All privileged the iconic, and the main 'paths' through the city. It was reminiscent, we felt, of Lynch's work on way-finding in Boston in the early 1960s.[4] At first, these crude drawings seemed profoundly uncinematic. There was no scale, and not much detail. However, having re-examined the bones of these hand-drawn maps we changed our minds. They were as filmic in their attention to a compression of time, space and human activity as many of the films from Hong Kong – or anywhere else – that we could cite from the past 10 years. We will consider this below in relation to an animated classic, *My Life as McDull* (2001), a film spin-off from the children's television series *Yellow Bus*, and also a film that tries to find a way around the spatial contours of Hong Kong.[5] We will also mention Wong Kar-wai's early feature *Chungking Express*, which relies on a carefully articulated path through Hong Kong Central for its emotional coherence.

Second, a simple online exercise scoped chromatic responses to the idea of a city. This produced a statistically strong emotional register of city image and feeling, where different places were clearly identified by a particular hue.[6] This is an interesting finding in itself (i.e. that Sydney is 'blue', while Hong Kong is 'red', with Shanghai somewhere between brown and grey). However, what is perhaps more intriguing is the way in which these chromatic spectra are (or are not) deployed in film, and the degree to which this might enable an emotional sense of the city to rival those of other cinematic venues (London, Berlin, Los Angeles). The decision with which people agreed on a certain colour to describe a city clearly evokes a dominant city character, a palette of experience and expectation, and a firm basis for designed adventures in film and marketing – both of which need to know about colour, personality and desire in order to fulfil their brief.

Brands and colour

The semiotician Jean-Marie Floch has described how certain images and ideas underpin brands.[7] He reminds us of the sophistication of the first really successful Apple logo (1977), whose symbolism entails 'lust, knowledge, hope and anarchy'[8] and which sported the rainbow colours (in the wrong order) – a (very Seventies) colour spectrum. This was an expensive choice as multi-colour printing is usually an impossible luxury. Most well-known brands opt for two colours, which can be used fairly cheaply on a number of different paper products. But, Apple has always claimed innovation, usability and an anti-Microsoft chic for its brand. Its famous bitten apple is a metonym of scientific and conceptual genius; the presumed 'biter' is Isaac Newton, just after the apple fell on his head. It's a joke, it's presumptuous and it's visually elegant. It also infers a sophisticated late seventies' understanding of the future online deployment of logos, and another joke. Colour is – virtually – no object, and now on Apple's web products, colour in the Apple's apple is eschewed, in favour of grey and white. After all, why use colour online when its meaning – possibility, daring, invention, elegance – is lost in a superfluity of 'free' colour elsewhere on the Internet?

Good branding thus supports and informs the power that resides in cultural ownership, and in product identity, and its visual logic relies on an understanding of the characteristics of particular spaces over time. In the global economics of product enhancement, marketing, city investment strategies and tourism campaigns, perhaps the most remarked recent version of branding expertise, it is interesting to note similar trajectories so many years later in the piece. In China over the last five years, branding has emerged as a descriptor and explanation of visual changes on the streets and in the media. Chinese urban consumers have moved away from basic survival and needs as grounds for purchase, towards symbolic consumption and the distinction of 'choice'.[9] Western brands led this new market in the early mid-1990s, but are now finding that they must compete with serious Chinese rivals. The learning-curve on brand equity, penetration and strength (the highly masculinised indicators of success) has been broached with extreme confidence by local companies. The top names in five main goods categories include Haier (white goods: China), Changhong (television: China), Motorola (handphones: United States) and Rejoice (hair products: China), whilst Legend (China) has become Lenovo and is setting itself up as an international player. It is also noticeable, however, that China-as-a-nation-state also finds branding an attractive, and familiar, proposition. This conceptual move is arguably an easy shift in a place where the spatial imaginary is so deeply imagined as coterminously ethnic, national and geo-political. In a recent debate on Chinese contemporary history, a scholar[10] noted that post-Liberation and pre-Reform China was rather easier to define and describe as an object of study, because it took such pains to define itself in a coherent and impermeable discourse of centred autocracy. It was an undisputed entity

at home and overseas, although not always a popular one. Revolutionary China's brand 'strength' and 'penetration' were based on an obdurate political vision, stated goals and motivations, a visualisation of people and place that was regularly and consistently repeated in public communications, and centralised power, reinforced by the strong brand elements of red, and Mao's image. The 'brand' was regularly updated by policy statements and revisions, but always with a sleight of hand consistency, at least in public, that brooked neither division nor extended argument. In the contemporary era, China has a challenge in retaining the central power and authority located in a singular, emotive and dependable narrative of the nation, whilst developing so much so fast and at such risk to stability and social cohesion. Brand China is perhaps the market's partial answer to the conundrum. It is a concept that – whilst not named as such – is certainly at work at all levels of diplomacy, political communications and population management. The national strengthening campaigns around 2002 – Beijing Olympics, the WTO entry and the Shanghai World Expo bids – were certainly leveraging an idea of a new China entering a new order, whilst remaining very much in the safe hands of the party-state. Current Party policy emphases on 'humanistic' development, and 'harmonious society' (*hexie shehui*) might also be interpreted in brand terminology as strategic core values! But it is foreign investors (especially those who specialise in advertising!) who extol Brand China loudly and clearly and to their own advantage:

> Coke and Pepsi have been selling Brand USA to the world for years.
>
> Brand China can be bigger than any of these. It has the resources of 6,000 years of history and a massive home consumer market to gather momentum from. The long term objective must be to make Brand China the number one alternative to the existing premium 'made in' brands.
>
> Brand China is all about the commercialisation of China's return to the centre of the world order and Saatchi & Saatchi wants to play a big part in that. In Beijing in April I exhorted Chinese companies to create Brand China. To develop uniquely Chinese products and market them through Chinese values.
>
> Today I'm extending my message to every company with operations in China. Every company with global brands should be adding a Brand China product to their brand stable.
>
> Brand China is a long-term vision. It will require coordinated and consistent delivery of messages about Chinese products by many brands in many product categories. I know that if there's one great quality in the Chinese culture it's a profound understanding of the long term. Foreign companies that want to position themselves to take advantage of Brand China will need the same patience and vision. Let's not kid ourselves, there are some powerful preconceptions in the global marketplace about Chinese products right now.[11]

Saatchi and Saatchi's brimming enthusiasm was not misplaced, although it focuses on products rather than location, thus avoiding much of the human contradiction (*maodun*), which adheres to a national brand in a centralised state. Products sell through rampant idea-ism (Roberts cites the 'purity' of a bottled water brand which I have never seen; so maybe it was not such great equity after all). But products only contradict each other (when they claim the same idea) and themselves (when they fail to deliver a tangible version of the marketed metaphor), rather than the logic of the state.

City brands both support and defy a national brand in more obviously political ways. A city brand has a necessary set of spatial and temporal connotations, which have the capacity to contradict or fragment a unified national narrative. Shanghai and Beijing's intra-urban rivalry is a case in point. However, in a more provocative sense – and one that opens up the question of the region – Hong Kong's brand campaigns are truly contradictory. Hong Kong's SAR government approved the development of a Hong Kong brand in 2001, based on a recommendation from the Commission for Strategic Development in 2000:

> Hong Kong needs to promote its unique position as one of the most cosmopolitan and vibrant cities in Asia to a wide-range of international audiences. A successful external promotion programme can have a significant positive impact on Hong Kong's ability to achieve a number of key economic, social and cultural objectives.[12]

The ensuing project involved international public relations and marketing experts, one of whom had worked with Tourism Australia during the Sydney Olympics and one who had experience of the development of the national brand of Wales. Their final brand product was a dragon's head which incorporated the letters *HK* and the characters *xiang gang* (in two colours – red and yellow),[13] a swash of bright colours echoing the dragon's mane (green, yellow, blue and orange on a red background), a tag 'Asia's World City' and a set of core values: *progressive*, *free*, *stable*, *opportunity*, *high quality*. As the Brand Hong Kong team worked their way towards the current values, logo and tag, the Hong Kong Tourism Board was also active in trying out ways of describing Hong Kong through word and colour. From 2000–03 visitors were invited to 'Discover Hong Kong' on a purple background, and to savour Hong Kong – City of Life – against a multi-colour swash. The current online campaign, (also purple on the front page), 'Live It, Love It!', is headlined by the ubiquitous film star Jackie Chan, Hong Kong's official tourism ambassador. The HK brand logo – which one might expect to see first – is on the second page of the Tourism Board's site, along with the Tourism Board's red junk logo, with the quality assurance 'golden tick' (also developed in 2000), and on the SE Asian version, information about Muslim heritage in the city, business travel, and the 2005 shopping festival.

From one perspective this site is neurotic. There is no single entry point into the city's character – except perhaps the welcoming arms of Jackie Chan, and it certainly does not go out of its way to deploy the brand values and colour palette of Brand Hong Kong. On the other hand, perhaps it is exemplary. Despite the confusion of logos and points of imaginative metonymic entry into the online cityscape, it is nonetheless demonstrating the core values: it is certainly a 'free', opportunity-led market as far as logo deployment is concerned. Hong Kong's identity is presented in its crowdedness, visual density, noise, bustle and evident dynamism. Especially at night these are visually realised through its endemic neon lighting and signage, a dynamic chaos that itself affirms Hong Kong's characteristic vibrancy. The existence and success of Hong Kong as a branded identity challenges the modernist notion of branding, relying as it does on ideas of 'a consistent personality' and 'constant change of image working against trust'. Branding experts we interviewed in Hong Kong and in Australia agreed that Hong Kong's brand was *itself*. The riot of colours at any moment in Hong Kong are essentially a product of the individual design choices of entrepreneurs, and contrast with Beijing's recent and conscious choice to favour a harmonious colour scheme based on grey. A recent Chinese symposium identified the non-traditional problem of colour pollution caused by thoughtless lighting, public art and advertising. It called for effective colour management of Chinese cities as they undergo redevelopment, following good practice in Europe and Japan.[14]

This can be seen as nostalgic, if we take the concept in its thin form – denoting a simplified version of an idealised past: ensuring a familiar and traditional visual landscape without the complexity and rapid change associated with decentralised initiatives. Hong Kong's approach was characterised by a unique mix of centralised cooperation and individuality. Following the SARS epidemic in early 2003, the 'take your breath away' campaign had to be scrapped, and Hong Kong needed something spectacular to help reimage the city. A lighting show by Australian company Laservision, who had previously designed lighting spectacles for Sydney's Harbour Bridge and Paralympics, was commissioned to again take the city's breath away, with an absolutely spectacular commandeering of its iconic buildings, and collaboration amongst its major investment and employment stalwarts. 'Symphony of lights' is a combination of strategic architectural lighting and laser beams above the city, with projections onto buildings and walls. Every evening for 20 minutes the display takes place over the harbour, over 2 kilometres of Hong Kong Island, and is a major tourist attraction as well as being one of the world's most ambitious light shows. The display has been so successful that a similar display on the Kowloon side of the harbour has followed from late 2005. 'Symphony' externalised wonder and magic to Disney-esque proportions of a literal 'wow' factor. This kind of activity is a challenge to cinematic phenomenology. The light show is both a body in itself and a mediation of the body of the city. It creates structural participation in place-

branding by invoking colour both through light and through secondary aesthetic engagement with the city's form: 'Light is the basis for seeing colour; the visual character of a habitat transforms under the effect of natural light variations throughout the day: it is bluer at noon, redder in the morning or evening.'[15]

Designing 'Symphony' was a major technical as well as an artistic achievement. Previously, light beams on major buildings were inefficient, uncoordinated and caused considerable light pollution. Yet coordination of lighting among competing companies owning skyscrapers, such as banks, was unlikely, since their electrical systems would not be designed to interface with each other, for security reasons amongst other considerations. Twenty skyscrapers are involved, and the owners of these iconic buildings as well as government representatives and other stakeholders had to agree to work together and to invest in the project, and to allow their building lighting to be centrally managed. Not just exterior lighting, but also staircases and corridors visible from outside had lighting designed for aesthetic purposes. The lighting could also be customised to provide different displays during the day or when the show was not occurring. Thus colours and designs could be changed to reflect corporate policies: the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank's famous red triangles design were represented or connoted by strategic lighting on its building. Ensuring lighting efficiencies and reducing 'pollution' through coherent design the display is spectacular, visually harmonious, flexible and – we would suggest – hyper-cinematic. It indicates a direct relation between a brand campaign and a light-based cinema of place (all film is dependent on the play of light) lodged through and addressed to the body of the city. It chromatically fixes the heterogeneity of Hong Kong through a marshalling of urban space: built topography, commercial interest and civic, emotional release.

Brand-nations

The brand expert Wally Olins has noted that nation branding (which can only just include Hong Kong), although often necessary to jumpstart an economy or stabilise a political regime, is always a difficult task to explain: 'national governments are understandably reluctant to conduct open discussions on a topic that is complex to explain, wins no votes, and can readily invite ridicule'.[16] The ridicule to which Olins alludes possibly arises from the very notion that an entire society, topography and urban character might be summed up in a brand, or, in any commercial activity which is popularly still associated with multinational product advertisement and consumerism. Whilst acknowledging that branding is a powerful tool of the world of global capital,[17] we would dispute the immediate refusal of the concept and activity as necessarily a 'bad thing'. Billig (1995)[18] and Olins himself have pointed out the direct relationship between marketing of the state – the flags, beliefs and values that are sported and promoted in the

politics of national identity, social norms and culture – and the imagined purity of a people in peace, and more dangerously, at war. Perhaps the self-conscious practices of branding are preferable to the invisible blandishments of national symbols, which we may, by default, defend when we dispute the contamination of geopolitical meanings by commercial practice. The problematic power of the idea of the nation state is powerfully demonstrated in small wars, petty deprivations of cultural liberty, and in large displays of geo-political bullying, and these tend to be associated, not with branding, so much as with nationalism. Branding may support national success, but the two phenomena should not be equated as the same thing – or the same set of impulses. There are, doubtless, versions of national brands, which promote certain kinds of homogeneity. Arguably, the United States is now in that category, given that internal security and the Patriot Act has tied overt political sentiments to anything that is allowed to pass as American on the world stage. As a result, perhaps, Brand America is failing where once it was the world's undisputed factory of dreams and possibilities, and varieties of hope. And in the weeks after this chapter was drafted, the debacle of Hurricane Katrina and New Orleans became a brand-wrecker for the US version of freedom, equality and hope.

There are place-brands, which are not normative in effect or affect, and for that story we return again to the question of colour. Despite the strict instructions (see note 13) for the use of brand Hong Kong's logo, one could argue that it is wonderfully chaotic. Hetero-manic Hong Kong sits on a porous border with the Motherland, which is, of course, red. Hong Kong cannot broach either sameness or strong differentiation to Brand China because of all that the physical proximity entails in terms of power differentiations and regional location. Hong Kong's spectrum must match the prevailing political hue of its sovereign state, but – for the brand to have any meaning at all – it must also look different – bright, dynamic, unique, colourful – but not oppositional, not strident, and certainly not a direct competitor with the pink aspirations of Shanghai and Beijing black. A survey in 2001 (HKSAR, 2001) associated Hong Kong with exactly those descriptors which we would suggest evoke the colour choices in the city's brand campaigns: Crowded (55 per cent), Dynamic (49 per cent), Unique (22 per cent), Noisy (12 per cent), Colourful (12 per cent). In our own research, we found that, whilst over 60 per cent of (400) respondents identified Hong Kong as red, there was also a range of difference: white, orange, rainbow, yellow ('because I like yellow and I like Hong Kong') and grey ('because it is polluted'). Feeling that a city is grey or yellow, purple or green, or all of these at once – rather than red or orange – is convenient for the deployment of a multi-coloured brand identity, especially one that has to compete online with Tourism Board colour initiatives, and long-standing iconic symbols; most powerfully, the red junk. Perhaps, Hong Kong's restricted political environment has not precluded a kind of imaginative freedom, which the brand has picked up, but which also challenges its cohesion.

Internationally, the power of colour alternatives is also beginning to be felt. Chinese mainland political institutions are wary of the 'colour revolutions' that have overthrown power elites in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan. Colour revolutions, so called due to the colours adopted as symbols of change (*Sydney Morning Herald* 15.07.05, 10), are a provocation to our own contention that nationalism and national brands should not be confused. The argument around colour revolutions is precisely that designed colours, and logos (Georgia's 'rose' in 2003, Ukraine's 'orange' and the pink and yellow tulip in Kyrgyzstan) are actors in the process of change and the emergence of new political identities. Colour revolutions typically overthrow an autocratic regime in favour of a youth-oriented, democratic idea, often modelled by backers in the United States. The involvement of international agents and supporters – particularly from the United States – in the work of local activists and youth movements, invites a quick comparison with international brand techniques and internationally dominant brand values. Is this an example of US nationalism working through the brand of another polity in order to further its market reach? And, if so, how stable a process might that be?

George W. Bush's attempt to apply the term 'purple revolution' to his US-led intervention in Iraq was not unproblematic (and it did not survive in mainstream media although the metaphor has a noisy following on the web, where apologists for US intervention argue that the purple finger is the sign of freedom, that it – presumably – transcends the smaller successes of more home-grown colour revolutions). Pro-Bush merchandise displaying graphics of a pointing finger smeared in purple at its tip[19] is at first sight offensive, then encouraging – and then the context of its publication makes it depressingly simplistic and aggressive in overarching intent. Does this again suggest that a confusion of brand and nationalism is counter-productive? Or, are we witnessing a sub-culture of global 'democracy' brands, which are more or less tied to US policy interests, and which are taken up by the non-pluralist, aggressive, 'democrat' republicans?

These questions are rhetorical, but they raise issues relevant to the apparent innocuousness of the Hong Kong brand. Place-branding is a serious game played by professionals, for the advancement of a place, its people and economy. It draws on the tone, the colour, the history, the ambition, the social ambience of a location to build a version of its international and domestic character, scaled for deployment to particular target groups, markets and investment interests. It is spatially highly contained, and yet ambitious in communicative scope. Political brands, whether interventionist as in the colour revolution logos or stable as in the red and blue of US politics, are also reliant on spatial contextualisation for their communicative power. A successful place brand is not inconsequential to this objective and the extensive interests of China bring the colour revolutions into a spatiality of political chromatics, which include Hong Kong. The liberation of colour is a factor in the creation of visual identities and national narratives, for good

and ill, for benign place branding and for seismic political upheaval. China will be unlikely to ignore the disruptive potential of the branding games played on its western frontier.

Other places, nostalgia and film

> 'All things Bright and beautiful, All creatures Great and Small! All things wise and wonderful, the Lord God made them all'
>
> (McDull at Kindergarten)

Simon Anholt is perhaps the most active professional supporter of the national brand as a project, arguing that branding can help developing and generally less economically powerful nations to position themselves as suppliers and traders internationally.[20] He also runs a national brand index-based on a consumer survey tool, which recently placed Australia, Canada and Switzerland in the top three places for developed, but not the world's leading, economies. Anholt explained, in relation to Australia, that the people surveyed were talking 'with their hearts', so – whilst they might not actually visit Australia because of the distance or the cost, and whilst they might not equate Australia's campaigns and films with 'culture' or a particular product item – nonetheless it all added up to something intangible and devoutly to be wished for. China scored rather differently: badly overall (it came in at no. 21), but it was 2nd in the world for 'culture', behind Egypt.

In the analytic terms of our present work, we might explain both these results in the West Pacific region as nostalgic. This time we are taking nostalgia to be an attitude to place, person or emotional memory that is connected to a sense of the past but which is actually a coping mechanism for living in the present, and thus the emergence of Australia as a 'top brand' is interesting to say the least. We would also suggest – that at least in relation to Chinese tourist materials, the brand 'Australia' is a metonymic deployment of Sydney – the Opera House, the Bridge and Bondi Beach (all jumping with kangaroos). So, regionally and in an environment of rapid urbanisation and absolute change, the nostalgia for a cleaner, sustainable but easily recognisable 'other place' is unsurprising. European and American responses to the Australian brand are perhaps somewhat more complex – or differently complex, Australia's distance, and erstwhile role as a recipient of the excess, or abject of English and European societies – renders it curiously precious but also under-valued and obdurately misunderstood. Culture is not the point in this articulation of any of these relationships with Australia and an Other Place – and the brand reflects this irritating truth.

Australia's Otherness is broached here because it is a case of a brand, which masks the nation's specificity and refuses its regional identity even as it clarifies its tone and iconic core (Sydney). Sydney in this brand narrative has no referents beyond the beach, the Bridge and the Opera House. Indeed, in most photographic images the harbour is shot as an enclosed

space rather than a waterway opening out to the Ocean and the Pacific Rim. In Hong Kong's case, where there is no internal competition from Other Hong Kong cities – but only the internal/external competition of mainland China, the brand delivers both aspiration and nostalgia through emphasising its role as a regional hub, a meeting place for diverse Asian cultures, from Malay Muslims to British expats and aspirational Pearl Delta investors. It is also an Other place, but one which pulls the region into its domain of 'living it' and 'loving it'.

The role of film in the branding process could be approached as incidental or contradictory. We argue here that in Hong Kong's case, film is an assumed character in branding, and that the city's character is likewise presumed in its film. The cinematic identity of Hong Kong is strong therefore but not monolithic. For the purposes of this discussion we speak briefly to two films which sum up two complementary films of the past decade or so: *Chungking Express* (1994) and *My Life as McDull* (2001).

Chungking Express is a Wong Kar-wai film, starring Tony Leung, Faye Wong and Brigitte Lin, and shot by Christopher Doyle, in the clubs, streets and small apartments of Hong Kong Central and Kowloon Tong. The story is familiar to most readers and we will not rehearse it here, suffice to say that it is an essay on place as a context to love, on repetition and impossible connections. The film is stylistically characteristic of Wong and Doyle's now famous approach to Hong Kong as a principal, organising character in the cinematic narrative. People move through repeated locations, performing their love stories as homage to the city rather than as a development of their own character narratives. If a character leaves the spatial trope of Hong Kong's iconic centres – Central and Kowloon (Faye Wong flies to California, the air-hostess flies all the time, Bridget Lin just disappears), then the character is dispersed, re-assembled only by letters home or traces left at the time of flight. The place of Hong Kong in this film is much like a branded city. It exists in relation to its own qualities, in a hyper-intense version of extended, permanent, nostalgia. The visitors and residents of the city are caught up in the narrative of place by virtue of the residence, visitation, presence, rather than by any peculiarities of their own. This insistent attention to the city's spatiality, imagined rather as our respondents imagined Sydney, through its paths and key points of reference, stabilise the core of the film's structure, whilst allowing space for the chromatic intensities of its tones – red being the overriding memory. Interviewed on his vision of the city in 2003, Doyle took one of the present authors on a night-time roust of the clubs and lanes – ending up with her collapsing on the sofa in a Central apartment. That turned out to have been the location for Leung's apartment in *Chungking Express*. What does this mean? First, as Doyle suggested with some astringency, a formal interview about 'what he felt about the city as a cinematic character' was going to yield less insight than experiencing his city with him, in his favourite quarters, at his (and its) most cinematic time-of-night. Second, we might claim that the film's location was a potent metonym

for the film itself but also for the city, and for the experience of the city, and as such operated in much the way that brand values and city icons are supposed to. The nostalgia, glamour and aspirational pull of the city could be felt 'in-place'. It needed the knowledge of a film, the sensation of being in the city, and the sensation of being in a place that was both invisible and crucial to Hong Kong's spatial hierarchies of affect.

Finally, we think about McDull. McDull is a fairly average animated pig. He attends a kindergarten, loves his mother – aggressively aspirational on her son's behalf – and tends to failure, mitigated by an endearing expectation of good things. The film offers a portrait of the city imagined by this small pig. The centre of his world is his mother, and his school, where he learns English, Singing and Creative Pissing. His reality is structured through the aspirations and daily pathways of his high rise urban suburb. Other places are conceived – in a child's way – only as a fantasy. At one point he falls sick and his mother promises to take him to the Maldives – his dream island – if only he would eat up his medicine and recover. She cannot actually afford to do this, but instead takes him on a magical tour of the Peak (with pencilled signs to 'the airport' and 'the Maldives' hastily pinned at his sight level). The magic 'works' and McDull fulfils his dream. Again, the premise could be read as of a contained brand reality, organised by certain paths through the iconic sights of the city, and lodged in a present-tense nostalgia, which manages its own aspirations by staying at home.

The chromatic fix is very blue, almost a pastel, in this film, where the ocean, which is the sine qua non of Hong Kong and its islands, is crucial to the pig's sense of spatial belonging (in another sequence he dreams of becoming Hong Kong's Olympic medallist in water sports). This is not one of the key brand colours in the Hong Kong palette – but should it be?

Conclusion

In this chapter we have attempted to fix some of the linkages between space, brand and cinematic identity, with particular reference to Hong Kong. We have briefly juxtaposed two Hong Kong films, and also considered some film and brand qualities of Hong Kong and a rival world city also positioning globally. The common concepts of story, narrative, and evocation of feeling, realised through visual means suggest specific appeals to a global public, and distinguishing propositions of identity. The positioning themes of Hong Kong pitch globally, beyond a narrow nationalism, but with a reinforcement of location identity through topographic and chromatic markers. The complexity and hyper-cinematic postmodernity of Hong Kong is highlighted by contrast with the apparent simplicity and straightforwardness of Sydney, a nostalgically-imagined clean and distant place, a land of lost content. For Sydney, the natural asset of the harbour, sunlight and beaches is essentially accentuated by its two iconic built structures, its unaffected blue colour, its openly presented consistency, its obvious offer, its disarming (and inaccurate)

promise of spatial simplicity. The Opera House does it very well, but, arguably, any iconic building would serve just as well as marker and accessory. Conversely, Hong Kong without its buildings and artificial lights would be considerably lessened, its own harbour operating rather as a backdrop for the real action of the built city. Blending Chinese stability with progressive values, with many stories, many colours, much activity, much change, contradiction and occasional symphony, Hong Kong defies many notions of traditional branding yet asserts its global aspiration and fugue identity consistently in its visual presentations and in the lived and filmed experience of its characters. And as imaginative film-makers literally or otherwise use the characteristic chromatic and topographic propositions of their regional location, we identify an abiding understanding of the places of our globe.

14 Jackie Chan, tourism, and the performing agency

Laikwan Pang

Many fans and scholars familiar with Jackie Chan's works can easily trace the Hong Kong identity in his films.[1] Many of Chan's films in the 1980s and 1990s, like the famous *Police Story* (1985, 1988, 1992, 1996) and *Project A* series (1982, 1987), feature Chan as Hong Kong's loyal civil servant, and these characters can be seen as salutes to Hong Kong's colonial identity as the reunification of 1997 pressed ever closer. In the previous decade, his obsessive concern for Hong Kong shifts from the city's colonial identity to the city's international image, which coincides with his appointment as Hong Kong Tourism Ambassador by the Hong Kong Tourist Association (HKTA) beginning in 1995. Since then he has fervently spoken for Hong Kong's tourism, often relating his personal pride as a Hong Konger and his determination to make Hong Kong a place for global admiration. This is also concomitant with his ascendancy as a Hollywood star. A large part of Chan's star persona in recent years thus becomes intertwined with the city image of Hong Kong – a situation which, as I demonstrate below, is carefully engineered by Chan himself and/or his company. His 'performance' on and off screen has been considered by others and himself as having a direct impact on Hong Kong tourism, including tourist perceptions of the territory. The 'reflectionist' approach to the study of popular culture that understands films or stars as social mirrors may have its critics, but the films of Jackie Chan and his star persona arguably provide an unusually apt case with which to fathom the link between the identity of a star and that of their community. Of course, Jackie Chan and Hong Kong are not equivalent, but as Chan's star image and Hong Kong's tourist image mutually penetrate, the interface therein throws an interesting light on the politics of Hong Kong's global identity with respect to the East Asian cultural context.

Between film and reality

Hong Kong and other Asian viewers familiar with Jackie Chan's films since the late 1970s will be aware of his screen image as a cheerful, spirited, but somewhat docile neighbourhood boy who will fight in fanciful ways only when pressed.[2] A dominating presence in Hong Kong's movie-making

industry for almost three decades, Chan has always been keen to expand his market and the name of Jackie Chan is now a known entity in many parts of the world. The American audience did not respond enthusiastically enough to *The Big Brawl* (1980) and *The Cannonball Run* (1981) – Chan's first two forays into Hollywood via Hong Kong's Golden Harvest – to confer on him Hollywood stardom, but his Hong Kong films continued to be widely circulated in the United States (and elsewhere) through videos and alternative exhibition outlets. Thereafter he had little, or no, association with Hollywood until the global success of his Hong Kong film *Rumble in the Bronx* (1995) some 15 years or so later. The Hollywood production *Rush Hour* (1998) starring Chan officially launched his Hollywood career.

Interestingly, in *Rush Hour* and all his subsequent Hollywood films, Chan would assume a submissive role, whether it be as a Hong Kong civil servant (*Rush Hour* and *Rush Hour 2* [2001]) or a royal guard of the Chinese imperial court (*Shanghai Noon* [2000] and *Shanghai Knights* [2003]); most symbolic of this would be his role as the attendant of a Western male master (*The Tuxedo* [2002] and *Around the World in 80 Days* [2004]). In all of these films, Chan's characters are content to play the subordinate role and fight only when asked to by his master (who presently is in danger). It is the undeterred loyalty to a master that constitutes the low-key heroism of these roles.

We will come back to this later. Here I would like to point out that this humble and submissive characterisation of Jackie Chan's characters has been accepted by Western viewers as normative. In Hong Kong, Chan's popularity is on the wane; this is shown clearly in the decreasing local box-office records of his Hollywood films. Hong Kong viewers might find his Hollywood films unattractive and his roles disgraceful; many are also repelled by his increasing didactic attitude to the Hong Kong people. Called the 'Big Brother' by the Hong Kong media, Chan is prone to give lectures, always telling Hong Kong people how to gain respect from others in the same ways as he has earned his from elsewhere, particularly in Hollywood. He assumes a heavy, Chinese paternal voice when he speaks to Hong Kong's media. He hates hip-hop (*HD*, October 29, 2003) and he claims that if he saw his son (a new singer) singing hip-hop he 'would beat him to death' (*WW*, March 29, 2004). He also despises new Hong Kong singers who sing only Japanese or Western songs (*MD*, October 29, 2003). There is also a strong nationalist dimension in Chan's lectures, particularly after the 1997 reunification. He is proud of his Chinese clothing, which he believes has influenced the taste of certain Hollywood stars (*OS*, November 5, 2003). He also criticised Taiwan's most recent presidential election as a farce (*UD*, March 29, 2004), which angered Taiwan's Democratic Progressive Party, so much so that some congress members launched an anti-Jackie Chan, anti-Hong Kong campaign (*HE*, April 23, 2004).

Chan's didacticism centres around a discourse of 'acting': that Hong Kong people have to present their best image and act in a self-respecting way, in

order to be valued by others or, most particularly, tourists. He is especially keen on teaching Hong Kong people about the importance of the media: one must perform well in front of the camera. For example, Christmas Eve has always been a chaotic night in Hong Kong, when hundreds of thousands of the residents and tourists wander around the main streets; youngsters create trouble, while rubbish and litter would pile up. In 2002, the situation was so severe that it caught the attention of the international press. This outraged Chan who then publicly lectured Hong Kong people, saying that they should stop making Hong Kong lose 'face' and accordingly learn to behave properly in public places (*OD*, December 30, 2002). He also criticised Hong Kong soccer fans who hooted at the then chief executive, Tung Chee-wah, when he launched a match featuring the Liverpool team from Britain. For Chan, this type of behaviour was unacceptable because the incident was beamed worldwide via satellite. This is damaging for Hong Kong's image, Chan asserts (*OM*, September 1, 2003). He even criticised the five hundred thousand people who gathered for a rally for democracy on July 1 of 2003, saying that this would scare away tourists (ibid.).

Jackie Chan claims that he has received not a single penny from the government and that he promotes Hong Kong out of his own good will (*SN*, September 16, 2003). In the last few years, he has travelled around the globe promoting Hong Kong as a tourist destination. He was most devoted to promoting Hong Kong after the SARS outbreak (*HD*, July 8, 2003), and also spoke up for the Hong Kong International Airport, calling it a stately tourist hub (*TK*, August 8, 2003). In turn, people all over the world associate Jackie Chan with Hong Kong. The Discovery channel invited Chan to host a 1-hour programme on Hong Kong (*OD*, September 28, 2002). On all these and others occasions, he would use the opportunity to promote his new films as well. The Hong Kong Tourist Board sponsored one of the two premiers for *Rush Hour 2* on a United Airline flight from Los Angeles to Hong Kong (*SN*, July 28, 2001). For Hong Kong's premier of *Highbinders*, he invited his international fans to visit Hong Kong, so that the occasion could be used as a publicity opportunity for both the film and Hong Kong (*MD*, August 8, 2003). Most symbolically, Hong Kong Polytechnic University conferred on him the title of Honorary Professor affiliated to its School of Hotel and Tourism Management (*HE*, January 30, 04). Jackie Chan as the widely accepted icon of Hong Kong tourism discourse is irrefutable.

Hong Kong's tourist discourse

As Jackie Chan becomes a Hollywood star,[3] Hong Kong quietly undergoes some turbulent changes under the new political regime. After 1997, Hong Kong did not experience a rapid decolonisation process, as seen in other postcolonial situations: no nation emerges from the ashes of the colony. Instead it has the Basic Law which has since guided its development, politically or otherwise, as China's first Special Administration Region (SAR).

The underlying principle of the handover master plan is stability. Predicated on a belief in 'Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong' (*gangren zhigang* 港人治港), the SAR government carried out reform on an extensive scale, from taxation to social security, from education to the entire civil service system.[4] But this was no 'nationalist' government with a nation-building agenda.

To alleviate political anxiety concomitant to the uncertainty that accompanied the changeover of sovereignty, these reforms have been framed in the rhetorical terms of developing Hong Kong into a better 'international' city for the global business community, with the city additionally conceived of as a tourist destination. The new Hong Kong SAR government, unlike Singapore after independence in the 1960s, galvanises and legitimises its restructuring process more in terms of meeting outsiders' expectations and demands than in the name of the collective well-being of the people. The 'One Country Two Systems' principle is maintained mostly through the balance of Hong Kong situated between 'global' (more so than local) and 'national'.[5] In other words, the territory's 'SAR-isation' after 1997 is carried out in the name of 'internationalisation', which makes it an exceptional case when compared to most postcolonial experiences.

It is within this political framework that tourism in Hong Kong becomes an interesting site of contestation and possibilities. Although Hong Kong has been a tourist city since World War II, tourism after 1997 has been loaded with a political burden. In Eastern Europe, the post-Soviet bloc nations strove to define their new identities by reconstructing their history and heritage, which is most blatantly revealed in their new tourism.[6] Similarly, tourism helps legitimise Hong Kong's reforms carried out by the new government, and such an emphasis on tourism for local development inevitably implies the self-objectification of Hong Kong. The 15-year transitional period (1982–97) has taught Hong Kong to subject its social and political future to the mercy of the international mass media, which is interested less in the colony than the volatile diplomatic relationship between China and the West.[7] The 1989 June Fourth event further 'interpellated' Hong Kong people to the global media network which made Hong Kong and its future an international media topic. Hong Kong becomes the crystal ball for both China and the West to look into their futures. The external gaze that puts Hong Kong in the international limelight can easily be internalised, so that the desire to flatter the curious global media in turn serves as a most powerful form of self-defining self-surveillance apparatus. The 1997 media frenzy thus subjected Hong Kong to a tremendous amount of global attention. The impact continues to influence its post-1997 identity, in the sense that Hong Kong is meaningful to Hong Kong only in terms of its connotation to the 'world tourist'.

But exactly who is this world tourist? In the last two decades, we have witnessed the increasing obscurity of the identity of the potential customer in Hong Kong's tourist discourse. The general assumption of global tourism is that people from the first world travel to the third world. Not surprisingly,

for many years visitors from developed countries comprised the major portion of Hong Kong's tourism trade, both in number and the amount of money they spent while visiting Hong Kong (HKTA 1972: 13). As evidenced in the advertising brochures and other printed materials of Hong Kong Tourism Association (HKTA), Hong Kong was then portrayed as an attractive tourist destination, but from the perspective of the West alone. In the tourist guide *Hong Kong: British Crown Colony* (1972), published by HKTA, almost all the promotions, except hotel services (with obvious reasons), are related to Chinese culture, for example, Chinese festivals and celebrations. The brochure ignores Western holidays like Christmas and Easter, even though they have always been integral to the city's life. The city's alleged close affiliation with Chinese culture was felt to be particularly marketable, considering mainland China's closed-door policy at that time.

Hong Kong's tourism continued to grow and reached a zenith in the 1990s. In May 1995 HKTA adopted a comprehensive 'Wonders Never Cease' campaign to coordinate thousands of private and public institutions to establish a new and all-embracing tourist identity for the city. The development of Hong Kong's tourist industry also peaked during the 'Wonders Never Cease' campaign. In 1996, there were more than 12 million visitors, reflecting a growth of 15 per cent over the preceding year (HKTA 1997). But most of these were no longer Western tourists. The arrival figures for mainland visitors have skyrocketed, as the Chinese economy soars. The more than 300 per cent increase in mainland tourists between 1992 and 1998 accounted for more than 30 per cent of all visitors to Hong Kong.[8] An increasing number of Taiwanese tourists has also visited Hong Kong in the last few years, and they are among the biggest spenders.[9] In contrast, tourist numbers from North America and Europe have dropped substantially during these years, and a large portion of these are returning émigrés who were once residents of Hong Kong.

The 1997 Asian financial crisis was detrimental to Hong Kong's tourism trade and saw a sudden decrease of 11 per cent in tourist arrivals (HKTA 1998a). This, together with the economic downturn, troubled the SAR government to the extent that it brought out the 'City of Life' campaign in 1998 to replace 'Wonders Never Cease'. This campaign was designed specifically to boost the tourist industry. It (or for that matter, the entire post-1997 tourism scheme) has been an integral part of the SAR government's economic plan. The Chief Executive's annual policy addresses highlighted several times the need for a vibrant tourism industry, with tourism described as a major component in the city's economic restructuring (Tung 1998, 2001). In 2001 HKTA was renamed and restructured as the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB), with the major aim of stepping up the Board's role of adviser to the government (HKTA 2001). HKTA proposed and announced elaborate plans as well as creating new tourist sites of attraction. Meanwhile, China's central government revised certain policies.

In 2002, it abolished the quota system for the Hong Kong Group Tour Scheme; this meant that Hong Kong could look forward to unlimited group tours from the mainland, on a daily basis. But mainlanders wanting to visit Hong Kong on an individual basis had to wait until 2004. In 2004, residents from selected cities in China could obtain individual travelling visas, that is, they no longer needed to take part in group tours organised by official travel agencies. These policy changes helped boost Hong Kong's economy that was failing at the time.

The new 'City of Life' campaign was developed around the abstract concept of 'life'. Comparing the advertising video of the earlier 'Wonders Never Cease' campaign with the footage of this campaign, it becomes obvious that the 'City of Life' video reveals less information about the city, leaving viewers instead to their own imagination, and they can therefore complete the city's image more effectively with their own expectations. The earlier video advertisement emphasises the city's cultural wonders in superlative terms that range from 'the largest professional Chinese orchestra' to 'the tallest outdoor seated Bronze Buddha'. It also stresses the city's unique life-styles, as the city is portrayed as having 'the most passionate horse racing fans', 'the most cellular phones' and 'the most Rolls-Royces'. However gimmicky these images and statements may be, they do reveal a concrete image of an oriental entrepreneurial city that is not ashamed, but indeed proud, of its fanatic philistinism. In the new 'City of Life' promotional footage, the titles supplementing the visuals are no longer factual descriptions but abstract concepts such as dawn, style, fly, taste, thrill, future, surprise, action, sparkle and so on. Precisely because of the potentially polymorphous signification of these words they appeal to the imaginations of any prospective visitors, allowing them to enrich these seducing expressions with their own fantasies.

Most recently, 'City of Life' has been replaced by the 'Hong Kong: Live It, Feel It' campaign that further reifies the abstract experience of tourism by expanding the many dimensions by which a tourist can come into contact with Hong Kong. In the latest advertising video, the abstract nouns are replaced by a full range of senses: feel it; see it; wear it; taste it; win it; rock it; swing it. These actions are as real as empty. The city is to be experienced and exploited in all dimensions; the tourist, regardless of one's gender and cultural identity, is invited to embrace Hong Kong in whichever way they like. In general, in the last decade, we see the strategy of the Hong Kong tourist discourse shifting away from providing concrete information on an Asian city to holding up an abstract image of an all-round world tourist space providing anything a tourist wants. As a result, the Hong Kong experiences offered are as full-fledged as they are empty and shallow – Hong Kong is dematerialised, and the identity of the tourist is also effaced.

Tourism and the society of the spectacle

As Hong Kong's tourism campaigns change through the years, Jackie Chan continues to be the spokesperson of Hong Kong's tourism trade. In 1999, the adultery scandal in which Chan was implicated led to a public outcry. Chan was urged to step down as HKTA's spokesperson, but he declined (*AD*, November 30, 2005). Other than Chan's own enthusiasm, the major reason HKTA (and later HKTB) kept him as its spokesperson has to do with the international popularity of his films: Chan is arguably the most well-known Hong Kong person in the world. Most importantly, the image of Jackie Chan in his films has been a consistently positive one, making this international icon an ideal representative of the Hong Kong persona. Recognising the great global success of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, HKTB is now even keener on using films to advertise Hong Kong (S. Chow 2001).[10] This saw the birth of Star Avenue, an imitation of Hollywood Avenue. One of the biggest tourist attractions of recent years, Star Avenue is lined with the handprints of Hong Kong's movie celebrities. Set in concrete, Jackie Chan was the first to leave his hand imprint (*BQ*, April 5, 2004).

In general, Hong Kong has become known around the world, largely through the fantastic images projected by its famous movie industry (and to a lesser degree, television as well). Like popular cinema, tourism offers excitement and escapism, and caters to associated desires. John Urry in his seminal study of tourism argues that the logic of tourism often functions along the basic binary division between the ordinary/everyday and the extraordinary; that tourists travel with the aim of seeking experiences, away from the mundaneness of the everyday. Tourist practices therefore always involve the notion of 'departure' from, or a break with, the established routines and practices of quotidian life.[11] To many world movie-goers, Hong Kong films, as the quintessential entertainment cinema, satisfy precisely such desires; they are often considered as providing a 'mood-altering, mind-bending, adrenaline-pumping rush'.[12] Hollywood, of course, portrays a specific image of the United States to the world's viewers, and this image is composed not only of appearances but also values, ideology and ways of living. However, Hong Kong cinema presents fragmented images and sensations, and is often identified by international viewers as a cinema of spectacle instead of narrative; Hong Kong filmmakers are criticised for not handling plot well.[13] Hong Kong's most accessible images to the West are fragmented ones, comprised of actions and hysteria instead of coherent narratives in which values are embedded.

Jackie Chan has often been criticised for his poor acting skills,[14] and for most Jackie Chan fans around the world, the appeal of his films would lay in the spectacularly staged action sequences. Chan epitomises the already intertwined relation between Hong Kong cinema and Hong Kong tourism, in which tourists are criticised as consuming only the 'superficial images' of a place instead of trying to understand the history, culture and the social

life of the destination. Tourists visiting Hong Kong largely seek superficial entertainment-oriented experience. The vast majority (82 per cent) of Hong Kong visitors stated that their experiences comprised mostly of sightseeing or photography-oriented activities, while only a few were particularly keen to learn about Hong Kong's historical culture and heritage.[15] Local critics find the increasing domination of the tourism trade detrimental to the development of Hong Kong's culture. The recently built Hong Kong Disneyland in particular is condemned as encouraging intensified commodification and alienation. As local critic Shi Pengxiang solemnly claims:

> the Disneyland demands complete control to its space as it fabricates faked happiness out of a reality loaded with pains and conflicts … The desire of the Disneyland to master its virtual reality is identical to any autocratic state in the world that wishes to master its people.[16]

The criticism of tourism is often directed against its tendency to conceal local people's everyday 'reality', and the tourist images must be constantly changed to cater for different consumerist expectations.

Similar criticisms are also heard among critics of modern visual culture: visual representations are no longer associated with reality, causing the social to 'implode' within image-saturated media societies. Guy Debord's 'society of the spectacle' typifies such criticism, in which the act of seeing is pushed to the limit and mushrooms into the sole component of reality. According to Debord, the spectacle is not only a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated completely by images and commodification. He says, 'There can be no freedom apart from activity, and within the spectacle all activity is banned – a corollary of the fact that all real activity has been forcibly channelled into the global construction of the spectacle'.[17] Therefore, the spectacle is not only appearance, but it also epitomises the prevailing model of social life.

The criticisms of contemporary tourism and visual culture overlap in Hong Kong, whose city image has been increasingly built on a spectacularised version of tourism. As I mentioned earlier, the recent development of Hong Kong's tourism has gradually emptied out the identity of the city and its inhabitants; this notion matches Debord's critique of the society of spectacles, in which all historical particularities are subsumed into the universal logic of 'Capital'. Photographic vision, that seems to require no effort at deciphering from the receiver, is particularly prone to such readings: it creates a 'universal' or, as Susan Sontag puts it, 'In contrast to a written account – which, depending on its complexity of thought, reference, and vocabulary, is pitched at a larger or smaller readership – a photograph has only one language and is destined potentiality for all'.[18] The increasing connection between photography and tourism – we travel in order to take pictures – makes Sontag's statement applicable to contemporary tourism too: through a camera, the entire world is readily understood by all.

Between seeing and performing

Underlying such critiques of the visual/tourist culture is the overwhelming power and automatism of the spectacle, as well as the naivety and passivity of the people involved. This approach clearly runs the risk of ignoring the activities of both the viewers and the subjects behind the spectacle, but it is also problematic to stretch the corrective terms to the degree that such agency is romanticised. The rest of this chapter is devoted to re-investigate such criticisms of the society of the spectacle through a careful reading, via Jackie Chan, of the 'performance' involved in tourism: tourism is always performed. However, the relation between performers and viewers in tourism is never naive: although the performers are clearly aware and manipulative of the consuming gaze, the performing agencies are not made any more autonomous from and subversive to the overall consumerism.

Along with the dematerialising tendency, Hong Kong's tourism campaigns in the last decade rely heavily on the performative, which shows the increasing alleviation of the city's colonial servitude to the West in order to entice a wider audience. Hong Kong re-packages itself as an object of desire to all anonymous consumers, offering different pleasures to meet different demands – visiting Hong Kong is a metonymical travelling experience that valorises imagination and desires. Similarly, Jackie Chan constantly changes his identity to suit different 'markets'. Other than being Hong Kong Tourism Ambassador, Chan is also an honorary citizen of Chicago, Paris, as well as Seoul and Tongyong of South Korea. He is a spokeperson for Beijing's 2008 Olympic (*TK*, April 18, 2001), Xi'an touristic ancestral rituals (*MD*, August 28, 2004) and, finally, post-September 11 New York City's Chinatown (*AD*, December 15, 2001). He also visited Indonesia after the recent tsunami, promising the Indonesian government that he would help promote tourism there (*MP*, April 20, 2005). In short, Chan grabs every opportunity to show his loyalty to people around the world, as if he is also Ambassador of the World!

We must recognise that in most tourism trades, the performance is highly self-conscious. While the spectacle plays an increasingly important role in Hong Kong's tourism, the Hong Kong people do not see Hong Kong accordingly. As Kwai-cheung Lo argues, Hong Kong people do not conceive of their city as a place of innocence to be contaminated by the invading US culture, thus Disneyland is seen as anything but cultural imperialism.[19] Disneyland is too faked a culture to affect local lives. Both the locals and the tourists are fully aware of its simulacra, and this awareness reminds us that tourism and the everyday life of locals should not be dichotomised. If the society of the spectacle is a totalising one, in which people are rendered completely passive and vulnerable, Hong Kong would appear to offer the contrary perspective, as the city seems to be highly aware of, and also adaptable to, the changing and demanding tourist gazes. To further explore the performative dimensions of Hong Kong's tourism, let us take a closer

look at Chan's performances in his Hollywood films where Chan constantly performs to the gaze of the surrounding viewers.

In order to escape from detective Carter (Chris Tucker), Lee (Chan) in the beginning of *Rush Hour* jumps onto a traffic light post in downtown Los Angeles, while a group of Asian tourists watch his acrobatic performances from a bus, in awe. In *Shanghai Noon*, the residents of the small American town cannot take their eyes off Chon Wang (Chan) because of his weird traditional Chinese costumes. They then laugh heartily at his painstaking efforts to speak English. In *Rush Hour 2*, Lee and Carter scramble across Hong Kong naked, their ungainly progress drawing the attention of the people around them. In *The Tuxedo*, Jimmy Tong (Chan) jumps onto a stage to clumsily imitate Afro-American singing and dancing, cheering up the entire audience. In *Shanghai Knight*, Chon Wang and O'Bannon's (Owen Wilson) mismatched outfits, time and again, attract the condescending gaze of the people around them. The entire *Around the World in 80 Days* is as much about how Chan sees the world as how he is being seen by the world.

As a muscular hero, Jackie Chan, unlike his Hollywood counterparts, is constantly being looked at. These acts of looking differ from Laura Mulvey's classical analysis of mainstream Hollywood cinema:[20] they are not narcissistic (the male viewer identifying with the male character) or voyeuristic (the male viewer watching the female character through the eyes of the male character); nor are they fetishistic (the male viewer seeing the female character directly as fetish). In Mulvey's analysis, the male looks, but does not perform. In Chan's Hollywood movies, the reverse occurs: Chan characters perform so as to be looked at. Obviously, Jackie Chan does not present himself as sexually queer; neither can we interpret the gazes Chan attracts as entirely racially driven, as demonstrated by the Asian onlookers in *Rush Hour*, *Rush Hour 2* and *Around the World in 80 Days*. Viewers pay to see Jackie Chan's films because he is laughable. In all of these scenes he attracts his viewers through bodily performances. Central to his action designs are always moments, however brief, in which the Chan character shows signs of weakness or paralysis of movement; this emphasises the enormous effort involved in the performances. Here Chan shows a debt to Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton: many of the funniest moments of his action scenes rely on a performance of his inability to control his body and the environment. In *Shanghai Noon*, for example, several comic scenes revolve around Chon Wang's failure to command his horse to comply with his wishes – the horse being an iconic symbol of the West and the Western genre. *Around the World in 80 Days* constantly highlights Chan's body as a cyborg and his difficulty donning a cyborg suit that constrains his athletic body. Chan is also a clown, sometimes an 'embarrassing' one too! Jackie Chan is never in full control, although this partial incapability is highly calculated to earn the trust of his masters/clients, if not to draw peels of laughter from the viewers.

One interesting consequence is the ambiguity of Jackie Chan's identity.

With regards to the aforementioned servant identity, is he a real servant, or is he just pretending? This is most clearly shown in *Around the World in 80 Days*, as the character is in fact using the role of the servant to mask his real identity. Chan's emphasis on performance also explains the contradiction between his subservient roles in his Hollywood films and the paternal voice he assumes in front of the Hong Kong people outside the fictional film space. As I have delineated above, Chan constantly reminds Hong Kong people of the need to 'perform' well in front of the global media. The performances are only for the consumption of others, which might have nothing to do with the real Hong Kong. Similarly, he is the Big Brother in reality, although he continues to be a servant in Hollywood films.

Seemingly, the Hong Kong tourism embodied by Jackie Chan does not agree with the society of spectacle theory, as the tourist spectacles and the people's reality are calculatively separated through 'performances'. We could interpret Chan's, and Hong Kong's, performing agency as subversive, as it presents a masquerade to manipulate the controlling gaze. However, it is also an illusion that we can in reality split performances for the tourist from everyday reality. How can Chan guarantee that behind the beautiful and cheerful city featured in its tourist promotion materials the allegedly hidden reality is unrelated to tourism? If Debord and many other Marxist critics are right that the social cannot be independent from the ideological, no performances can at the end escape the dominating ideological control – capitalism. I do not believe that by granting a certain sense of performing agency to Jackie Chan and Hong Kong the two can be freed from capitalist control. Quite the contrary, they continue to perform within the scope of self-commodification, in which self-control can only go so far.

Among the six Hollywood films he has made, I think Chan is shown most ill-at-ease in the massage parlour named Heaven on Earth in *Rush Hour 2*, in which Hong Kong tourism is most directly yet shamelessly displayed. The first 30 minutes of *Rush Hour 2* was set in Hong Kong, which, according to Chan, was his idea: he made the Hong Kong setting one of his conditions for making the film.

> My principle is [that my films could have] no pornography and no violence. … I suggested to the producers to set part of [*Rush Hour 2*] in Hong Kong. There are two major reasons. First, I am Hong Kong Tourism Ambassador, and I should introduce the best images of Hong Kong to people all over the world. I want the story to be set in the most representative places of Hong Kong; those hotbeds of pornography and violence in Yau Ma Tei and Tsim Sha Tsui are places I avoid. … Secondly, more foreign productions in Hong Kong mean more employment locally.
>
> (*TK*, March 28, 2000)

If one of Chan's terms was to associate Hong Kong with no pornography, the film clearly suggests otherwise. The film starts with Carter's vacation in Hong Kong, with Lee promising to be his tour guide. Lee, however, is suddenly given an assignment to investigate a recent bombing of the local American consulate, and so has to take Carter around to track down the suspects. Among the places they visit are a bar, a massage parlour and a cruise ship party, in which sexy girls gather around Carter. Carter's sexual consumption is suggested most blatantly in the massage parlour called Heaven on Earth, when Carter indulges in the visual display and the actual services of the sexy massage girls, while Lee is shown embarrassingly not knowing exactly where to direct his gaze. The roles of the three parties in this scene are very clear: Lee, as the local comprador, brings Carter, the American tourist, to consume the girls, one of the tourist services provided by Hong Kong. It is in this self-reflexive scene that the Hong Kong Tourism Ambassador role that Jackie Chan has so proudly assumed is stripped to its rotten core. In this scene, Lee is placed in the background, shown either out-of-focus or smiling embarrassingly. This Tourism Ambassador cannot look at Carter nor the girls, as if he does not dare to look directly at the scene presented in front of him – the very Hong Kong the beautiful tourist images are trying to hide!

The performances making up tourism are constantly contradictory, because the gaze to be satisfied is highly volatile, which desires entertainment and fun instead of a coherent identity of place. Hong Kong and Jackie Chan are both highly conscious of one's performance to satisfy the changing commodifying gaze, which must be exciting yet non-threatening, respectable yet docile, funny yet sincere. However, no matter how hard the performances try to emphasise the illusionary and pleasing images as superficial, these performances also make up the Heaven on Earth massage parlour. According to Judith Butler, there are two levels of meanings to gender performances. On the one hand, the body produces gender in its very iteration and performances, so that our gender norm is constructed precisely through gender performances. Similarly, the tourist performances of Hong Kong and Jackie Chan will also somehow confer them their 'identities'. On the other hand, as performance is a process and is transformative, there is also a subversive dimension. Identity is forged through performances, yet performances can also reveal the performative nature of identity, so that performance can be both constructive and destructive to identity formation.[21] The gendered body is performative because 'it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality'.[22] More so than the gendered body, the tourist body is fictional at its core, constantly changing to locate and satisfy the tourist desire. However, the transformative and subversive dimension of such tourist performances, which could challenge the underlying tourist desire, has yet to be seen in Jackie Chan's stardom and Hong Kong's tourism.

Abbreviations of newspaper and magazine names

AD: *Apple Daily*, Pingguo ribao 蘋果日報
BQ: *Beijing qingnian bao* 北京青年報
HD: *Hong Kong Daily News*, Xinbao 新報
HE: *Hong Kong Economic Times*, Xianggang Jingji ribao 香港經濟日報
MD: *Macao Daily News*, Aomen ribao 澳門日報
MP: *Mingpao*, Mingbao 明報
OD: *Oriental Daily*, Dongfang ribao 東方日報
OM: *Open Magazine*, Kaifang zazhi 開放雜誌
OS: *Oriental Sunday*, Dongfang xindi 東方新地
SCMP: *South China Morning Post*
SN: *The Sun*, Taiyang bao 太陽報
TK: *Takungpao*, Dagongbao 大公報
UD: *United Daily News*, Lianhebao 聯合報
WW: *Wenweipo*, Wenhuibao 文匯報

15 Niche cinema, or, *Kill Bill* with *Shaolin Soccer*

Peter Hitchcock

Before discussing Stephen Chow's contribution to the specific contradictions of world cinema (an analysis that will require the recent work of Quentin Tarantino as a foil) I want to situate this phenomenon in terms of critical categories and symptoms. The idea here is not to displace the important cultural impact of Chinese cinemas within globalisation but to give some sense of the degree to which this emergence must be read as a necessary injunction to rethink globalisation's processes and the circulation of culture within them. The path to *Shaolin Soccer* (Chow, 2001) via a concept of niche cinema may seem a relatively easy one, a no-nonsense case of 'nonsense film' as a sub-genre of comedy; yet, whether we glory in this popular segment or not (and 'popular' is very much a loaded term in global cinema) there is more at stake in its apprehension, especially and precisely because of East Asia's central role in accumulation on a world scale. The power of the niche is not simply a consequence of economic prowess but is integral to its very possibility as a mode and strategy. On one level niche cinema may be read as a logical extension of this power through the development of transnational image markets, but it also helps to understand the limits of this system in its form and substance, liminal edges that become apparent in the ambivalent codes of visual quotation. Indeed, I will argue that the niche and quotation together constitute vital lines of inquiry that question the assumed parameters of world cinema at this time.

One of the defining characteristics of postmodern culture is the art of quotation or intertextuality which, true to postmodernity's avid disdain for originality (or more accurately, the cult of the original), can actually be found all over cultural history but is given a specific twist in postmodernity through the expansion of pastiche and affective flattening afforded by globalisation. That this is a manifestation of economic import is not surprising since quotation under the sign of global commodification is apposite not just with brand extension but the new transnationalism of piracy (I use this to mean not only that cultural quotation offers an aura of similarity within the bounds of fair use but also that the logic of commodification itself is compelled to breach this limit – a little quotation goes a long way via global distribution and consumption networks).

In fact, global culture, postmodern or otherwise, often combines two contradictory notions of quotation: the first amounts to what Harold Bloom made famous as the 'anxiety of influence' in which the artist struggles to articulate aesthetic difference while paying deference to the long traditions of culture that inform it; the second idea casts off all measure of insecurity by avidly drawing on bodies of culture, high or low, as always available for avaricious consumption.[1] The first tendency intimates the burden of cultural history; the second revels in this reservoir of meaning as yet one more item to hock. The first type of quotation acknowledges the sacred; the second form stamps it with a barcode. If contemporary quotation could keep fear and pleasure discrete one would assume that cultural producers and consumers alike would take the easy route by tossing out the complexities of origin and tradition, yet the intensification of commodity values on a world scale diminishes the possibility of choice in the matter. One must bear the anxiety of quotation even when unaware of its putative source.

If distinction, in Bourdieu's sense,[2] promotes a variety of discourses intent on producing and maintaining class stratification, quotation on a world scale problematises such divisions by commodifying the privilege of reference as yet one more means of general circulation. We might say that the distinction of distinction cannot be so easily preserved when quotation is simultaneously the field of discernment and exploitation. Cultural contact enables greater and greater quotation but this accumulation comes with a demand to suffer the consequences of an impossible epistemology, one that actually might embrace knowledge outside the commodity relation (keeping in mind that a quotation is also the offer of a price, hence my preference for it here over intertextuality). This is quotation as acknowledgment and disavowal (of knowledge).

A pessimistic appraisal of this logic, which within capitalism bears the mark of a consummate bourgeois antimony, would say that all that is new in transnational culture is the capacity to array quotation, a dynamism that feeds further accumulation but one that offers stasis at the level of originality. A more positive approach would still have to accept quotation as a commodified reflex but argue that the newness of the arrangement does not simply nourish another business cycle. Instead, it identifies what actually constitutes its question for aesthetic originality as a process that points *to* sources and not away from their evaluation. What if quotation were less a narrative shorthand in the hyperreality of contemporary circulation but a medium of troubled integration that doubts in various ways the ability of the commodity relation to expand adequately a planetary epistemology through cultural 'exchange'? Far from assuming cultural homogeneity, the availability of quotation accentuates difference in the global mix and fragments formal and generic markers into ever increasing sub-categories where the privilege of expertise is as admirable as it is short-lived. This indeed, is the contradictory field of cultural production in which the concept of the niche is symptomatic.

Economically, the niche is typically used to characterise market segmentation, speciality branding intended to maximise returns on an individual product line and associated tie-ins. Niche marketing ostensibly addresses the consumer's desire for individuation, but a preference broad enough to ensure both social recognition and capitalist economies of scale. If we think of the niche as a reflex of desire it is not hard to see why it is a staple of cultural production because it facilitates a complex range of identification across a seemingly limitless reach of commodity variations, each one attempting to marshal desire just long enough to permit exchange between consumption and accumulation. The risks are clear but the niche answers them by minimising loss using short-run production and circulation. The niche can also be a variation on test marketing a cultural commodity: if the niche produces intense consumption the producer may expand the line and encourage a broader distribution network. This narrative, of a narrowly-marketed product, fetishised as such, becoming a global commodity is also as old as capitalism but again the logic of the niche, like that of quotation, has a specific valence in contemporary cultural relations because of the level and speed of transnational integration and because of its special emphasis on lifestyle consumption as ontological, as a primary means of being in the world. The niche can both nurture commodity desire in new spaces for consumption and extend exchange where quotidian consumption is otherwise already saturated by commodification.

The link between the niche and quotation is akin to I. A. Richards' remark on the poetics of tenor and vehicle: here the former denotes a generalised logic of commodification whose metaphor of the subject is defined by the act of consumption; the latter is a means to embody this process while drawing attention to an historical and cultural specificity that the short life of a niche might otherwise be seen to subtend.[3] Such an inappropriate mix of terms is itself symptomatic of what is appropriate and appropriated in global orders of circulation. There is no virtue in catachresis except to gauge how category crisis troubles not just parochial aesthetics but the profane tendencies of commodification itself. These comments are notational devices not formulae; they connect to a more substantial body of critique bound to an elaboration of the cultural logic of globalisation. The niche can neither guarantee its market nor sublate its counter-logic, a situation that globalisation intensifies.

How might Stephen Chow's *Shaolin Soccer* (2001) clarify the conditions of niche cinema as a vital component of transnational image markets? On the face of it, Chow's hilarious and outrageous comic romp would seem to trump in advance the solemnity requisite of capitalist rationality, even as it clearly rides its motives and exploitative logic. The film puts its trust in a carnivalising narrative that, on the one hand, challenges genre conventions of various kinds and, on the other, attempts to break out of Chow's primary market, Hong Kong, by using China and a 'Chinese' symbolic (Shaolin kung fu) as a conduit for transnational distribution, a transnationalism typified by

its secondary content, football or soccer. The plot, if one dare call it that, is so closely allied to its marketing strategy that the narrative functions as a 'how to' brochure. Indeed, it is precisely the obviousness of its intent that paradoxically made it difficult to sell as a transnational niche. 'Golden Leg' (Ng Man Tat) is a crippled former football star whose playing career is ended when he chooses to throw a match for the suave gangster of the game, Hung (Patrick Tse Yin, a former matinee idol of Hong Kong cinema). Hung himself is a rapacious businessman who may be a cliché but treats football for what it is: a corporate sports franchise with a global reach. 'Golden Leg' chances on 'Mighty Iron Leg' (played by Chow himself), a Shaolin kung fu maven who finds his art out of fashion and collects trash in Shanghai to make ends meet (the location itself speaks directly to Chow's marketing prowess). Together 'Iron Leg' and 'Golden Leg' will put together a team of like-minded lost Shaolin souls to take on Hung's 'Team Evil' and win the Chinese Supercup by combining 'Golden Leg's' soccer savvy with 'Iron Leg's' 'bullet-time' shooting ability. It is a tribute to Chow's irrepressible sense of the carnivalesque that we identify with his hero while the film itself backs Hung's ideology of crass marketing and global ambition. In truth, 'Iron Leg' himself shares much of Hung's outlook (he sees soccer as a means to popularise Shaolin martial arts) but believes that business should be bound by monk-like purity of expression rather than drug-enhanced performance (Team Evil are seen being pumped up with 'American' drugs, a not so sly reference to the double standards applied to Chinese sports stars by the international community, an aura of suspicion that will no doubt re-emerge in time for the 2008 Olympics in Beijing). As countless reviews attest, the premise is entirely silly but good slapstick has a way of entertaining serious consequences.

Until recently, Stephen Chow was the most successful Hong Kong director *not* to have won broad crossover and transnational appeal, a limitation built in part by rumours about Chow's alleged connections to the Hong Kong underworld. To be sure, his acting credentials are what established his reputation in Hong Kong (both in film and on TV) but once he took on directing (*From Beijing with Love* [*Guo Chan Ling Ling Qi*, 1994], *The God of Cookery* [*Shi Shen*, 1996], *King of Comedy* [*Xi Ju Zhi Wang*, 1999]) and tried his hand at screenplays Chow's career took off. The brand of comedy in which he excels is '*mou lei tau*' (of which more below) which is the bedrock of a specific Hong Kong niche, yet his ultimate skill I would argue is to be found in modulated quotation whereby each comic element is pulled and stretched to invoke myriad filmic sources in collision and collusion. Often held up as a quintessential postmodern blender, Chow chooses his ingredients carefully yet produces a narrative surface that is as wild and chaotic (and to some, as tasteless) as the most over-zealous recipe. It is not video-sampling that extends the niche but the play of reference that permits different levels of audience engagement. Comedy, of course, is the most difficult genre to translate verbally so Chow preserves the intricacy of Cantonese humour at

the level of language while allowing visual reference to transcode, effectively, its possibilities for a broader market. The piratical aspect of quotation here does not refer to stealing but to subversive reference. Whether riffing on *The Matrix* or the iconography of Bruce Lee, Chow's narrative constantly acknowledges the success of action sub-genres while underlining the vulnerability of their rules of identity (we might call this reference as irreverence), both at the level of form (the components that constitute a visual stylistic) and that of commodity (its market segment can itself be parodied as yet one more market segment). To be sure, Chow has been doing this for some time (his *From Beijing with Love* is a veritable Bond with abandon) but it is only with enhanced transnationalism, overdetermined by the anxious mobility associated with the Hong Kong 'handover' of 1997, that Chow's quotations assume a more vital visual currency. In this sense, the Hong Kong niche now appears paradoxically involuted: the pleasures of parochial plagiarism are simultaneously the stuff of global circulation. If, as Voloshinov surmised, the sign is inexorably Janus-faced,[4] Chow's *Shaolin Soccer* suspends any hierarchy of discrete apprehension of one meaning over another. A nod to the niche is at once a wink about its inconstancy and this, by and by, is a parable about the fate of cinema production based on place, a tremulous narrative artfully indicated in the title of David Bordwell's study, *Planet Hong Kong*,[5] and the conference to which an earlier version of this paper contributed, 'Hong Kong/Hollywood at the Borders'.

What helps Chow's very rational exuberance are the special effects deployed to enhance the action sequences (Metro Light Studios and Centro Digital Pictures both worked on the fabulous CGI for the film). If some of these are not that far removed from those of video games, this is only to say that Chow is not about to distance his core demographic, the tech-obsessed teenage boy for whom over-the-top action is merely everyday kinesis. Yet there is a specific wonder in watching a ball kicked so hard it turns into a comet or a sweet bun formed in a vortex of kung fu chops. Indeed, when the cast breaks into a dance sequence it is but a logical extension of the joy of movement registered in the wild football games on view (a tribute to the all-around choreographic aplomb of Ching Siu Tung). The obvious marketability of these sequences would be sufficient for some movie moguls but it was only after *Shaolin Soccer* broke Hong Kong's box office records and picked up most of its major awards that Harvey Weinstein of Miramax swooped in for world distribution (this aspect of the life of niche cinema will require further elaboration). Yet the deftness of the action is matched by the allegory of cinema played out in the back story for the big games. Recall, Mighty Iron Leg's cause is not soccer per se, but the popularisation of Shaolin kung fu, something not impossible according to local markets but a taller order as a global brand. Of course, as a niche kung fu is already long well-travelled but the point is that globalisation has given it more market depth: cross-cultural quotation has already been market-tested in the Hollywood blockbuster as the allusions to *The Matrix* make clear. Thus, although the

character in the film does not address cinema as a vehicle for kung fu, Iron Leg's every strategy confirms its crucial link to his (and Chow's) *raison d'être*. As we laugh at Iron Leg's early attempts to sell kung fu (the kung fu karaoke sequence is both hilarious and excruciating in equal measure) we are also asked to share a joke about the absurdities of global cinema where nothing is sacred except the bottom line. Iron Leg's desperate mix and match strategy is no more or less than a Hollywood pitch ('*Shaolin Soccer*, it's like Bruce Lee meets Jim Carrey' – or the kind of combination used to describe Chow himself). Even when Iron Leg's team wins the Chinese Supercup (itself a gag about a certain country's tendency to present national sports as global events) the narrative asks why should kung fu stop there? At the end of the film a billboard advertising *Time* magazine has Iron Leg and Miu (his girlfriend) on the cover celebrating their victory in the World Bowling Championships! If Hong Kong cinema is bleeding to death from the rapacious rapiers of globalisation and DVD dubbing then Chow's film constantly reminds us that as a niche Hong Kong cinema has some sword-play of its own. According to capitalism's version of the *pharmakon* we should at least giggle our way to oblivion.

Chow wagers that since the film does not take itself seriously nothing he says of cinema will go much beyond self-abnegation, but before testing out this theory of the niche by reference to Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill* more should be said about the life of *Shaolin Soccer* as transnational cinema. Miramax bought the rights to Chow's film long after its run in its primary Hong Kong and Chinese markets. The film had been dubbed into English for the Toronto Film Festival and the first thing Miramax ordered was a restoration of the Cantonese dialogue and the addition of subtitles (not a difficult task since these were both available on the Asian bootleg and official DVD). More controversially, Miramax decided to edit down the film from 112 minutes to 89, principally to play down the dialogue scenes in favour of the wire-fu and computer-generated action sequences. Take out all of that '*mou lei tau*' wordplay, the thinking went, and the film will sell itself on, well, Shaolin and soccer. Chow was not averse to the editing idea; after all, the Hong Kong DVD had already shortened the film by ten minutes. What irked him, however, was Miramax's bizarre sense of timing, not just of the comedy within the film but of the exhibition date. By the end of 2003 Miramax had announced and withdrawn its release date for *Shaolin Soccer* six times and pundits wondered whether it would be released at all (since it was also sitting on Zhang Yimou's *Hero* at the time suspicions were also raised that 'Chineseness' was the problem – yet Zhang's film, of course, would go on to become an American box office success in the summer of 2004). The trouble was less about editing but when to introduce an international film in the studiously fickle American market. Miramax seemed to get it wrong on both scores. The shortest version of the film mangled the pacing of the humour and the already fragile plot line while its eventual release at the end of March 2004 (some three years after its Hong Kong

debut) gave it a lot less than iron legs and it quickly disappeared to make way for the Miramax DVD. Interestingly, the latter underlined the editing miscues by including the short and long versions of the film, although one could now argue that all of the delays, whether from editing or marketing, were preparing the ground for Chow's bona fide transnational blockbuster, *Kung Fu Hustle* (about which more in the conclusion), but this would be Chow's tactic, not that of Miramax, who did not buy the rights for the more recent film.

Yet when it came to the marketing of Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill* Miramax's strategies were nothing less than textbook. Once the decision was made to split the film into two parts, itself an economic more than an aesthetic choice, the film's progress followed a classic film franchise logic, right down to the possibility of a sequel at the end of Volume Two. Prior to the release of Volume One, Rick Sands of Miramax eloquently stated the simplicity of the business model deployed:

> This is the beauty of having two volumes – Volume One goes out, Volume Two goes out, then Volume One Special Edition, Volume Two Special Edition, the two-pack, then the Tarantino collection as a boxed set out for Christmas. It's called multiple bites of the apple. And you multiply this internationally.[6]

One can only imagine the joy of a Christmas Day that combined the *Kill Bill* boxed set with, say, Mel Gibson's *The Passion* (2004). Meanwhile, the DVD for Volume One appeared just after *Shaolin Soccer* hit the cinemas and just before Volume Two went into exhibition. The timing is not as important in connecting these films as how they treat quotation as a logic of niche. If Chow's references are loud, Tarantino's are copious and sometimes bury the narrative under hipper-than-thou quips that do not so much test the viewer's knowledge of b-movies and/or cult films as they do the more modest category of patience. Nevertheless, for all Tarantino's calculated interpellation of postmodern culture geeks his *Kill Bill* has drawn significant attention to the history of popular Asian film in contradistinction to, for instance, the Wachowski brothers' slick introjection of kung fu style in the *Matrix* franchise. Perhaps this adds up to the same level of disinterest, referencing for its own sake, but even if Tarantino's quotation feels hodgepodge it can push niche cinema beyond the impress of his own predilections. He shares with Chow a genuine regard for Bruce Lee (the most obvious sign being an homage to Lee's yellow tracksuit from *Game of Death*) and, again like Chow, is a devotee of the Shaw Brothers oeuvre (the Shaw production company's logo begins *Kill Bill* and Tarantino's own production company, Rolling Thunder, has re-released Shaw films). There are many other corresponding sources for both *Shaolin Soccer* and *Kill Bill*, but what does it say of global cinema that similar quotation can interanimate such different cinematic space? Is it merely one more indication that

Hollywood can celebrate its hegemony by gobbling up Asian market share via a studied sprinkling of local cultural references?

Tarantino's stylised version of ultra-violence plucks liberally from Chinese and Japanese cult films in such a way that in *Kill Bill* they read like a brand extension of Tarantino himself. If his career is deemed at the margins of Hollywood, few are surprised how well his visual quotation is enabled by Hollywood's production of the independent niche. Hollywood here is a production logic that is not simply an effect of globalisation but is one of its most powerful cultural expressions. Hollywood knows how to package a bad boy by keeping him close to their core strategies. The Tarantino brand is one of the strongest reminders that Hollywood manufactures market segmentation, or niche marketing, where different target audiences are allowed to indulge their fantasies through the reality of exchange. This does not mean that all that is left to an interrogative cinema is either niche marketing or market aphanisis (disappearance before the force of the market) which would be both cynical and basically untrue.

Niche cinema is cinema's doubt, cinema's inkling that the value in the real as unrepresentable implies a further supplement, a kind of specularisation in the spectacle that haunts cinema's function in commodity chains. On one level, then, we have a conception of the niche that describes what regional cinema like Hong Kong's has to be in order to survive the predations of the Hollywood hegemony, real or imagined; on another, we have the possibility of a surreptitious coding that is genetically and generically suspect – a logic of cinema that, largely irrespective of authorial intent, picks away at Hollywood's extensions and pretensions, a visual mode that so beautifully embodies commodity logic that it questions such similitude, troubling its surfaces with obdurate obeisance, wondering at the wonder of technology that is its very possibility.

Niche cinema is about the interrogation of Hollywood by approximation, including the proximate distance facilitated through globalisation. The conventional reading is to see market segmentation as capital's infinite flexibility in accumulation – even your absolute difference and individuality return under the sign of commodification. Instead, niche cinema is a nick in capital's compulsion globally, so that fragmentation ultimately confounds even capital's rationalisation, and that each niche, nick, cut, bleeds the possibility of unproblematic transnational integration and assimilation, and thus torments the joy of recognition. But there is niche cinema and then there is niche cinema.

The difference between Tarantino's studious quotation and Chow's of the same material does not reside in the authenticity of engagement but in the relative weight of the popular in the niche established or interpellated. In the case of *Kill Bill*, appropriation as approximation takes the form of quotation subsumed to the value of Tarantino's brand. While these visual allusions are not any old references for Tarantino, they are not necessary for the standard revenge plot to work. Almost four hours of 'suspense' basically

steer the viewer to the denouement announced in the title. The task is not so much to suspend disbelief regarding Bill's fate but to piece together the path to that inevitability from Tarantino's trademark elliptical scrambling of event sequence along the way. As for the violence, its scale is simply a measure of its sources, from Kurosawa blood-spray to the energetic slice and dice swordplay of *Shogun Assassin* (that Uma Thurman, The Bride, watches in Volume Two). A postmodern prank like the *Scary Movie* franchise can succeed in its spoofing because of the proximity of the popular discourse from which it draws (often all that it does is amplify the reflexivity already prominent in its sources, like *Scream*). Tarantino does not depend on that familiarity or proximity in his primary market, only on the expectation that some form of quotation is at work.

Does this mean that Tarantino's ideal viewer for *Kill Bill* is the same as Chow's, the culture vulture of kung fu and samurai movies who finds the reference integral to the narrative experience? If so, within transnational cinema Chow faces the reverse problem: that the niche cannot travel to the United States or European market simply on its appeal to a core quotation community. Such interpretive communities, to borrow from Stanley Fish, are not dialogically balanced within globalisation precisely because of the relative economic power on which Hollywood logic feeds.[7] The populist base for Chow's references may seem more secure within Chinese and Hong Kong distribution networks but they are much more fragile beyond them. That this is also true of Tarantino's film throws into relief both the logic of power at stake and that his niche looks first to the primary market while the quotation device desires a further 'bite of the apple' outside it. To the truism that global cinema is not an exchange of equals, we would have to add that at this stage quotation reveals it to be a series of travelling localisms.

If *Shaolin Soccer* does 'Kill Bill' according to this conceit it is because Chow seeks to integrate quotation with a populist appeal to the local via his skilful use of '*mou lei tau*' or no brain/nonsense comedy, an intervention at the level of language (with sight gags) that acts as an abrogation of the taxonomies of transnationalism for clearly it is not meant to travel or travel across; it is a concretisation of the Hong Kong local that interpellates a Cantonese diaspora but does not easily translate, if at all, into capital's global 'I'. Full of intricate double entendres, tongue bending dialect tone slips, impolite puns, insults and over the top slang, '*mou lei tau*' is, as Linda Chiu-Han Lai points out, a 'specific grammar of laughter' that not only constitutes much of the dialogue of *Shaolin Soccer*, but informs its dialogicity vis-à-vis transnationalism.[8] Lai suggests that '*mou lei tau*' both draws on traditional folk humour and subverts the high/low cultural distinctions that once separated it from classicism. She also argues for a kind of visual equivalence in its workings about which I am less convinced, but the point here would be that *Shaolin Soccer* seems to stage the tension that occasions the transnational niche: it wants to fight Hollywood hegemony on the world stage but carries in its sling a means of undoing that world as the mere

exchange of equivalents. Thus, niche cinema is not just what gets separated off from the desire to unify markets but exists within those markets as an aporetic reminder of the difference that cannot pass unproblematically through the cinematic apparatus.

Our basic definition of niche cinema would include a category for parody and pastiche (staples of postmodern panache) but '*mou lei tau*' goes further and articulates the niche as something largely unrecuperable within world cinema. Certainly it does not escape commodification (and nor would Chow wish this for all of his wild quotation), but it complicates the notion of a happy conversation between, let us say, an East and a West that have become used to borrowing or stealing each other's visual economies in the cause of sameness or portable quotability. Thus, if quotation oils the circulation of global cinema, the logic of the niche may well confound this very process, almost despite itself.

To some extent, this too is visible in Tarantino's foray into martial arts. First, *Kill Bill* takes its sword to the pronounced parochialism and condescension of the Hollywood set. While there is an obvious tendency that one might watch this film in lieu of those it quotes I believe its metonymy is designed to be read back from its profuse referencing. On this level, its transnational niche is a constant reminder of that which still exists to be seen (although for most Western film scholars, one always has the Hitchcock/De Palma nexus that also receives a treatment in the film).

Second, *Kill Bill* is, like *Shaolin Soccer*, interested in exploring the visual dynamics of martial arts, not just to get you from A to B, but to examine movement within screenspace. If it is not the visual equivalent of a tone poem, it is still much more than a lurid fascination in putting the art in arterial spray. Perhaps from this perspective *Kill Bill* exceeds Tarantino's own visual cool as niche, subverts his geeky weirdness with homage as harangue, so that niche cinema can also be characterised as that which subverts its own clichés by extending them beyond all possibility of reverence. Its criticism lies more in the querulous quotation rather than the faithful one and on this point *Shaolin Soccer* again 'Kills Bill', for it substantiates the niche as also the art of the untranslatable, as Hollywood's supplement and not simply complement. One of Chow's earlier films, the *God of Cookery*, was almost picked up for a Jim Carrey remake (instead Carrey played someone God-like in *Bruce Almighty*) but no matter how Shaolin kung fu is transmogrified, its basic kick will remain: as an art that cannot be swallowed whole by reference and referentiality.

Yet Hollywood can do very nicely with the partial and the often peremptory. Indeed, we can still ask whether *Kill Bill* is a consummate sign of learning from Asia, or is it in fact a visual footnote on the asymmetrical ignorance that is its very possibility? Such a question not only takes up the visual components of the niche and quotation but the full range of what we might call 'cine-mediation' as currently construed. Thus, Hollywood is not just the name for a particular configuration of huge transnational

corporations that pursue vertical integration: it is the logic for a particular mode of commodification that saturates both the content of films and the cinematic apparatus itself, so that the theoretical conditions of the perspectival and the aspectival are conjoined, shall we say, like 'Five Fingers of Death' (to mention another of Tarantino's quotations) on the throat of the Real.

The study of cine-mediation under globalisation necessitates attention not just to how the logic of the eye in the apparatus reveals the object as the seen but how the aspectival codes the production and circulation of the unseen, the condition of non-representation that paradoxically permits the agglomeration of thingness to proceed. A theoretical foray of this kind would suggest that, with their copious quotations and hip cross-referencing, both *Kill Bill* and *Shaolin Soccer* seem to question only the viewing *habitus* of the audience. Nevertheless, the challenge is to read the visual logic of quotation as a taxonomy of commodity circulation that neither extinguishes pleasure nor elides its contradictory nature across cultures. The advent of global cinema intensifies two paradoxes: that its resources permit the impossibility of 'seeing' the value form as such, and that its circulation stabilises difference by capitalist integration (such stability is relative and allows for regional variations in content and style precisely to maximise 'value' as a constitutive goal).

Such questions of circulation and its theoretical perquisites in the study of cinema are perhaps beyond the reach of the current critique but I would like to consider, by way of conclusion, their connection to the sequel, the franchise, and seriality as they pertain to Chow and Tarantino. To export *Shaolin Soccer*, Chow hoped to overreach any limits of localism associated with Hong Kong kung fu by taking the brand power of football as its global accent. But despite more than respectable box office and DVD rentals and sales in East Asia, Miramax could not conjure this magic in its own core markets, North America and Europe. The demographic profile used to market *Shaolin Soccer* was hopelessly confused for transnational circulation, especially if the film sought to break into coveted American distribution and exhibition. That so many American reviews used the pithy phrase 'Bend it like Stephen' only served to underline the elusive quality of the film for a broadly 'Western' public.

Earlier, however, I suggested that the delays in its American release had the effect of preparing the audience for Chow's brand of humour because it brought *Shaolin Soccer* closer to the release date for *Kung Fu Hustle*. Although Chow is respected for his timing, on this occasion the sequence was closer to serendipity. Indeed, because of the problems with Miramax, the marketing of *Kung Fu Hustle* was shifted to Sony Pictures Classics, who saw a clarity in the more recent comic romp that was missing in the previous film. The rousing American success of *Kung Fu Hustle* in the spring of 2005 gives credence to the idea that quotation modulation can nevertheless give the niche a surprisingly consistent package.

If the recent film shares with *Shaolin Soccer* a conventional theme, underdog fights evil and succeeds in spectacular fashion, over-the-top action sequences (if anything, the CGI and wire-fu work in *Kung Fu Hustle* was even more accomplished), side-splitting slapstick and the obligatory subplot of love (substitute pimply dumpling maker for mute ice cream vendor – I should add that while Chow is no feminist, his women characters often question what constitutes an action hero in remarkable ways; indeed, in *Kung Fu Hustle* the landlady, played by Yuen Qiu, explores a moral universe no less complex or contradictory than Uma Thurman's Bride in *Kill Bill*), it is a sequel that yet challenges summary notions of seriality. *Kung Fu Hustle* follows *Shaolin Soccer* by quoting from similar films and featuring the same lead (Chow as the universal Sing) but it places its aesthetic much more firmly in Chow's specifically Hong Kong sensibility: it is cosmopolitan, frenetic, unashamed, and passionately centrifugal in its displacements. In other words, *Shaolin Soccer* pins its faith to football's version of globalisation, but in the later film Chow understands more fully that it is Hong Kong that is the key to niche extension: it has emerged as its own transnational franchise. When Esther Yau writes of 'Hong Kong in a borderless world' in *At Full Speed*, her careful exegesis of Hong Kong cinema nevertheless points to another possibility which is that Hong Kong *is* a borderless world.[9] The paradox of essence in its niche cinema is involution, that it begins from a margin that tirelessly questions the pretensions of Hollywoodisation by taking each element of narrative as a more ambivalent extension of identity in exchange (I am more hesitant to term this involution 'Chineseness' although it is noteworthy that a recent major exhibition of Chinese art in New York was called 'Inside/Out').

In *Kung Fu Hustle* Chow still signals that he is learning from Hollywood not just by quoting liberally from *The Matrix* once more (not surprising since the choreography is in the hands of Yuen Wo Ping, yet note the way that the infamous 'burly brawl' from *The Matrix Reloaded* is sent up by shear multiplication) but by invoking its entire history, from Buster Keaton and Charles Chaplin silents, through Thirties gangster flicks, effervescent dance musicals (*Singin' in the Rain*, *Top Hat*, and *West Side Story*), Westerns (particularly in the opening sequence), cartoons (Road Runner is referenced, but also much of the Looney Tunes catalogue) and their effulgence into action films (*Superman*), stylised horror (*The Shining*) and the auteur violence of Scorcese and, yes, Tarantino. The latter, as I have suggested, attempts to fashion a lesson in East Asian action film but submits quotation to the daunting appetite of Hollywood consumption.

When concessions are made to an East Asian audience (in their version of the first volume of *Kill Bill*, the Japanese are permitted more colour and a more explicit disembowelling), they do not disturb the advantages of Tarantino's position: niche extension is merely confirmation. On this level, *Kill Bill* (Volume Two) is a study in complementarity. While its tone often

provides a marked contrast to the droning extreme violence of its predecessor its logic is not about to upset the single project from which it was carved. In a sense, there is no adversary: David Carradine as Bill establishes a wonderful continuity with his otherwise long-lost Kung Fu TV past. His death from The Bride's 'Five Finger Exploding Heart' move is an artful consequence, notable for the fact that after all the butchery of the previous four hours it is quietly internalised. Here again, Chow's film 'kills Bill' because its signature kung fu move, the 'Buddha Palm', externalises the spiritual and refuses to celebrate god-like fetishism at the very moment that it ordains its global circulation. To call this defamiliarisation may be to grant too radical an edge to Chow's carnivalesque manner, but it does raise a final question about his aesthetic of niche and quotations.

Perhaps this is indicated in the addition of the word 'hustle' in the English-language version of Chow's film. The art of Hong Kong cinematic kung fu is its reliance on exaggeration and the hyperbolic, dramatic movement notable for both precision and timing. One can delight in its kinesis only because the human body is constantly being called upon to do more than it can. It is not a hustle since the impossibility at issue is the essence of audience expectation. There is, of course, a hustle that is part of the plot of Chow's film, Sing and his friend try to extort money from the denizens of 'Pig Sty Alley' by pretending to be members of the infamous Axe Gang, but one cannot help feeling that in the American market, the hustle extends to Chow's as he attempts to popularise his art with the earnestness that Sing uses in *Shaolin Soccer*. Even from this perspective, however, the hustle is not disingenuous. Far from it. The conceit is entirely consonant with the bald-faced aims of a cinematic transnationalism that cleaves closely to the intensification of commodity desire.

Just like Tarantino, Chow's passionate embrace of the history of popular film makes quotation more than subliminal but turns it into sublime moments of global integration. The difference in their art is a measure of the profound inequalities of transcultural negotiation, a series of socio-economic contradictions that the logic of the niche itself foregrounds. This does not mean that the prospects of Hong Kong cinema are limited to either trans-local content (e.g. kung fu) or self-deprecating laughter. Such a view would clearly misrepresent individual directors, like Chow, and the complex historical formation of Hong Kong as an economic and political hub. Nevertheless, Chow's bold foray into the global market not only builds on the success of other Hong Kong or broadly Chinese directors (both art house and popular) but also offers the niche as delightful displacement. And, while it is the Bride who celebrates her defeat of the murderous Bill, it is Chow's brand extension from the same resource of quotation that picks away at the iconography that is gathered in Bill's name. Or, to put it somewhat cryptically: the Bill is being paid, but who is increasingly accumulating the interest? Niche cinema is now a primary arena in which such struggles

and displacements can be symptomatically assessed. The fact that Chow has found a formula to battle Bill at the box office is not the point: it is what it says of general circulation that makes his intervention all the more remarkable. And this is a lesson that may be taken beyond a specific niche within contemporary transnational cinema.

Notes

Introduction: Hong Kong cinema and global change

1 S. Fore, 'Golden Harvest Films and the Hong Kong Movie Industry in the Realm of Globalization', *The Velvet Light Trap* 34, Fall 1994, pp. 40–58.
2 S. Fore, 'Home, Migration, Identity: Hong Kong Film Workers Join the Chinese Diaspora', in *Fifty Years of Electric Shadows*, Hong Kong: The 21st Hong Kong International Film Festival, 1997, pp. 130–35.
3 Cf. P. Philips, 'Genre, Star and Auteur: An Approach to Hollywood Cinema', in Jill Nelmes (ed.), *An Introduction to Film Studies*, London: Routledge, 1996, pp. 150–56.
4 K. Law and F. Bren (with S. Ho), *Hong Kong Cinema: A Cross-Cultural View*, Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2004.
5 P. Aufderheide, 'Made in Hong Kong: Translation and Transmutation', in A. Horton and S. Y. McDougal (eds), *Playing it Again, Sam: Retakes on Remakes*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998, p. 19.
6 Zhong B. X., *100 Years of Hong Kong Film Enterprise/Xianggang Ying Shi Ye Bai Nian*, Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 2004, pp. 225ff, and Fore, 'Golden Harvest Films', pp. 40–58.
7 *Hong Kong Tourism Board*: www.discoverhongkong.com/eng/touring/hkii districts/ta_dist_ytmk4.jhtml#stars (accessed 20 November 2005).
8 A. H. Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999.

1 From *South Pacific* to *Shanghai Blues*: no film is an island

1 Translation mine.
2 S. Teo, *Hong Kong Cinema: The Extra Dimensions*, London: British Film Institute, 1997, p. 167.
3 Cf., D. Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong: Popular Cinema and the Art of Entertainment*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000, pp. 139–41, 143, 148.
4 Ibid., p. 183n2.
5 P. Hitchcock, 'Niche Cinema; or, *Kill Bill* with *Shaolin Soccer*,' Chapter 15, this volume.
6 D. Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong: Popular Cinema and the Art of Entertainment*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000, pp. 18–19.
7 Cf., A. Magnan-Park, 'The Heroic Flux in John Woo's Trans-Pacific Passage: from Confucian Brotherhood to American Selfhood,' Chapter 2, this volume.
8 Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong*, p. 13.
9 Cf., E. C. M. Yau, 'Introduction: Hong Kong Cinema in a Borderless World,' in Esther C. M. Yau (ed.), *At Full Speed: Hong Kong Cinema in a Borderless World*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001, in which Yau observes a

striking irony in regards to the transnational phenomenon of cross-cultural arts appreciation: 'when Europe's artists reference the non-West, this gesture adds value to their work and their originality; but when non-Western artists reference Europe and the United States, their work is deemed derivative and inauthentic' (p. 8).

10 Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong*, p. xi.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid., p. 16.
13 Ibid., p. xi.
14 Teo, *Hong Kong Cinema*, p. 148.
15 For a comprehensive overview of Tsui Hark's career, see Li C. T., 'Through Thick and Thin: the Ever-Changing Tsui Hark and the Hong Kong Cinema,' in S. Ho and Ho W. L. (eds), *The Swordsman and his Jiang Hu: Tsui Hark and Hong Kong Film*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2002, pp. 12–23.
16 A. Abbas, *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, pp. 26, 30.
17 Ibid., p. 28.
18 Ibid., p. 26.
19 Ibid., pp. 25–26.
20 At the 5th Annual Hong Kong Film Awards Ceremony (1984), *Shanghai Blues* receives numerous nominations, including Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actress, and Best Song.
21 Abbas, *Hong Kong*, p. 33.
22 In the early 1970s, the Hong Kong film industry witnessed a resurgence in Cantonese filmmaking, with Cantonese films becoming the norm by around 1980. But market considerations often dictated that they came with an export version in Mandarin as well. Taiwan, for example, had a predominantly Mandarin-speaking population. At the time, Singapore was also a significant importer of Hong Kong films, but they had to be in Mandarin because there was a blanket ban on Chinese dialect films in the island-state. This was a consequence of that country's language policy which, among others, decreed that Mandarin was the only acceptable Chinese language in the mass media. This policy has been in place since the late 1970s.
23 For genres 'specific' to Hong Kong cinema, see essays, discussions and interviews in the following Hong Kong International Film Festival catalogues, published by Urban Council or Hong Kong Film Archive, Hong Kong: *Cantonese Cinema Retrospective 1950–1959* (1978); *Hong Kong Cinema Survey 1946–1968* (1979); *Cantonese Cinema Retrospective 1960–1969* (1982; rev. 1996); *A Comparative Study of Postwar Mandarin and Cantonese Cinema: the Films of Zhu Shilin, Qin Jian and other Directors* (1983); *A Study of Hong Kong Cinema in the Seventies* (1984; rev. 2002); *The Traditions of Hong Kong Comedy* (1985); *Cantonese Melodrama 1950–1969* (1986; rev. 1997); *The China Factor in Hong Kong Cinema* (1990; rev. 1997); *Hong Kong Cinema in the Eighties* (1991; rev. 1999); *Mandarin Films and Popular Songs: '40s–60s* (1993); *Cinema of Two Cities: Hong Kong–Shanghai* (1994); and *Hong Kong New Wave – Twenty Years After* (1999). See also A. L.Wong (ed.), *The Cathay Story*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2002, and A. L. Wong (ed.), *The Shaw Screen: a Preliminary Study*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2003.
24 See J. Lacan, 'Tuche and Automaton' and 'From Love to the Libido,' in J.-A. Miller (ed.), *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. A. Sheridan, New York: Norton, 1981, pp. 53–66 and pp. 187–202, respectively.
25 Cf., *Waterloo Bridge* (starring Mae Clarke and Douglass Montgomery; dir. James Whale, 1931); this Universal Pictures production is a precursor to MGM's *Waterloo Bridge* which, like the latter, is based on Pulitzer-winner Robert Sherwood's popular Broadway play of the same name.

26 The seven names, listed on the bottom right corner of the bill, may well have been the names of cinema-theatres in and around Shanghai, but this is not a clear given.
27 For a discussion of this film and its reception, see Gong Sunlu, *Concerning China Cinema History/Zhong Guo Dian Ying Si Hua*, Vol. 2, Hong Kong: Nan Tian Press, 1962, pp. 27–30. According to Gong, the film became controversial when the Shanghai Association of Doctors took out an injunction against it. Its members took offence to the film's portrayal of the medical profession when it features a doctor who is a rapist who has no qualms refusing treatment to a sick baby. Although unsuccessful in getting the film banned, such an injunction was unprecedented.
28 There appears to be no surviving print of this film; so I am reliant on secondary sources. Cf., Guo Hua, *Old Movies 1905–1949/Lao Dian Ying*, Hefei: Anhui Jiao Yu Chu Ban She, 2000, p. 78
29 Gong, *Concerning China Cinema History*, p. 29.
30 Ibid., pp. 11–15.
31 *The Minstrel Show*: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minstrel_show (accessed 3 May 2006).
32 Before the name change, Darkie has a grinning minstrel logotype – pearly white teeth, thick lips, top hat and all. Darlie now features a racially ambiguous face. The Chinese name remains the same as before though: *Hei Ren Ya Gao*, or, literally, Blackman's Toothpaste. See D. C. Mcgill, 'Colgate to Rename a Toothpaste,' *New York Times*, 27 January 1989, LexisNexis; and also n.d., '10 Years Ago; Darkie no, Darlie yes,' *South China Morning Post*, Hong Kong, 16 May 1999, via LexisNexis. For a blog debate, see 'Darkie Toothpaste': www.sinosplice.com/life/archives/2004/11/26/darkie-toothpaste#comments
33 P. Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, trans. Geoffrey Wall, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978, p. 61.
34 L. Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory and Fiction*, London: Routledge, 1988, p. 25.
35 Cf., G. Marchetti, *Romance and the 'Yellow Peril': Race, Sex, and Discursive Strategies in Hollywood Fiction*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993, which, among other things, critically examine issues of sex and race in relation to well-known Hollywood productions contemporaneous to Logan's *South Pacific* – for example, *Sayonara* (dir. Joshua Logan, 1957) and *Love is a Many Splendored Thing* (dir. Henry King, 1955). These productions typically feature an interracial romance between a white American man and a native girl, set in the postwar era, in exotic faraway locations, or, as in the case of the two examples here, Japan and Hong Kong, respectively.
36 J. A. Michener, *Tales of the South Pacific*. New York, The Curtis Publishing Co., 1946, repr. Sydney: Dymock's Book Arcade, 1951. In the 1950, the book saw its twelfth reprint, thus attesting to its best-selling status. *South Pacific* the musical derives its plots primarily from the following two tales in Michener's book, namely, 'Our Heroine' (pp. 85–106) and 'Fo' Dolla' (pp. 124–77). Since opening on Broadway in 1949, the musical – according to one website – has clocked in some 1,925 performances. See '*South Pacific* the Musical': www.allmusicals.com/s/southpacific.htm (accessed 26 November 2005)
37 J. A. Michener, 'Storyteller's Note,' in Michael Hague, *James A. Michener Retells South Pacific*, San Diego, CA: Gulliver, 1992, p. 28.
38 Ibid.
39 Michener, *Tales of the South Pacific*, p. 103.
40 '*South Pacific* Synopsis': www.allmusicals.com/lyrics/southpacific/---southpacific synopsis---.htm (accessed 26 November 2005)
41 Michener, 'Storyteller's Note,' p. 29.

42 Michener, *Tales of the South Pacific*, p. 149.
43 France Nuyen's birth-name is France Nguyen Vannga.
44 Bloody Mary, Liat's mother, also has a French-Vietnamese connection since she is a Tonkinese souvenir dealer. That is to say, she is an emigrant of Tonkin, otherwise known as North Vietnam. I would like to thank Gina Marchetti for drawing my attention to this French-Vietnam connection during a private conversation.
45 'Biography for France Nuyen': http://us.imdb.com/name/nm0638395/bio (accessed 26 November 2005).
46 For a close study of his film in relation to colonial censorship, see Tan See Kam, 'Ban(g)! Ban(g)! *Dangerous Encounter – 1st Kind*: Writing with Censorship,' *Asian Cinema* 8.1, Spring 1996, pp. 83–108. See also C. Vaillancourt, 'Review' (June 2002): http://hkcinemagic.ifrance.com/siteanglais/atsuihark/amenutuihark.htm (accessed 26 November 2005).
47 From this freeze shot, *Fist of Fury* then zooms sharply in to Bruce Lee/Chen Zhen's heroic face of fury for a close-up. This close-up then closes the movie.
48 Do-Re-Mi's debut as a song composer is first announced in a billboard, with Zhou Xiaoxian getting top billing. Seen earlier in the film, Zhou Xiaoxan is portrayed as the hottest recording artist in postwar Shanghai; she also looks like Zhou Xuan of this period. The title of De-Re-Mi's debut song is *Wan Feng*, or, transliterally, *Evening Breeze*.
49 In Chinese language films, '*Zai Jian*' has a similar function to 'The End' seen in English language movies. Another common alternative term would be '*Zai Hui*'.
50 'Gayatri Spivak,' in S. Harasym (ed.), *The Post-colonial Critic/Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, New York: Routledge, 1990, p. 158.

2 The heroic flux in John Woo's trans-Pacific passage: from Confucian brotherhood to American selfhood

1 J. Sandell, 'Interview with John Woo,' *Bright Lights Film Journal* 31 (January 2001): www.brightlightsfilm.com/31/hk_johnwoo.html (accessed 1 July 2005).
2 D. Desser, 'The Kung Fu Craze: Hong Kong Cinema's First American Reception,' in P. Fu and D. Desser (eds), *The Cinema of Hong Kong: History, Arts, Identity*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 19–43.
3 K. Sek 'Chang Cheh's Revoluion in Masculine Violence,' *Hong Kong Film Archive Newsletter* 22 (2002): www.lcsd.gov.hk/CE/CulturalService/HKFA/english/newsletter02/nl22_3.html (accessed 1 July 2005).
4 Y. Tian, 'Fallen Idol – Zhang Che in Retrospect,' in K. Law (ed.), *A Study of the Hong Kong Cinema in the Seventies*, Hong Kong: Urban Council of Hong Kong, 1984, pp. 44–46.
5 See K. E. Hall, *John Woo: the Films*, Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1999.
6 See J. Stringer, '"Your Tender Smiles Give Me Strength": Paradigms of Masculinity in John Woo's *A Better Tomorrow* and *The Killer*,' *Screen* 38.3, 1997, pp. 25–41.
7 In an interview, John Woo states:

> My characters have a code of honour and loyalty. Life is so precious, and I want to show this. My kind of hero is chivalrous. Asian or western, these ideas can be understood. They are universal. Violence is not the only thing. There is something more in human nature and in the human spirit. I believe it is goodness and loyalty. My hero possesses these qualities but he is always misunderstood. My heroes are lonely and tragic, like myself I see myself as lonely and tragic.
>
> (Sandell, 'Interview with John Woo': www.brightlightsfilm.com/31/hk_johnwoo.html)

8 Confucius is the Latinised form of Kong Fuzi who is also known as Kongzi and Master Kong.
9 See, for example, W. M. Tu (ed.), *Confucian Traditions in East Asian Modernity: Moral Education and Economic Culture in Japan and the Four Mini-Dragons*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996.
10 Confucius, *The Analects of Confucius* 17.6., trans. S. Leys, New York: W. W. Norton, 1997.
11 W. T. Chan (trans. and comp.), *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963, 69–70. Confucianism is a phallocentric philosophy. Consequently, the basic five relationships are directed towards the male population. The female population had three gender specific additional duties. Each woman was expected to remain subservient to her father, husband and son throughout her lifetime. For a gender comparison on filial piety between men and women, see P. B. Ebrey (trans.), 'The *Book of Filial Piety for Women* Attributed to a Woman Née Zheng (ca. 730),' in S. Mann and Y. Y. Cheng (eds), *Under Confucian Eyes: Writings on Gender in Chinese History*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001, pp. 47–69.
12 King Hu preferred *wuxiapian* featuring *xianu* protagonists. Cheng Pei Pei was his key action actress in the classic *Come Drink with Me* (1966).
13 J. J. Y. Liu**,** *The Chinese Knight-Errant*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1967, pp. 4–7.
14 If *gweilo*/*gwailo* (literal translation of 'ghost man' but originally used derogatively to indicate a 'foreign devil'), the racist Cantonese slang for a Caucasian, is acknowledged, then the vacancy is an inhuman one, which is another level beyond 'barbarian'. In contemporary Hong Kong, *gweilo* has lost most of its derogatory venom but it still retains its xenophobic sentiments.
15 Sandell, 'Interview with John Woo': www.brightlightsfilm.com/31/hk_johnwoo.html.
16 S. H. Liu, *Understanding Confucian Philosophy*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998, pp. 13–14.
17 A. Abbas, *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.
18 *A Better Tomorrow* was designed as a colour remake of the 1967 black and white film *Ying xiong ben si* (*True Color of a Hero*). Tsui Hark's original idea was to centre on the friendship between three women but John Woo changed it to three men. The 1986 remake was released in Hong Kong under the original 1967 Chinese title. K. E. Hall, 'Personal Interview with Terence Chang,' in *John Woo: The Films*, 97.
19 John Woo's projects outside of full-length feature films include the TV projects *Once a Thief* (1996) and *Blackjack* (1998), and a short film, *The Hire: Hostage* (2002).
20 See Y. Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and the Action Cinema*: New York: Routledge, 1993, pp. 35–53.

3 Hong Kong film goes to America

1 Various aspects of the cross cultural connections between Hong Kong and Hollywood, are discussed in E. M. K. Cheung and Chu Y. W. (eds), *Between Home and World: a Reader in Hong Kong Cinema*, Hong Kong: Oxford University Press/Hong Kong University Press, 2003; L. O. Stokes and M. Hoover, *City on Fire: Hong Kong Cinema*, London: Verso, 1999; *Postscript* 19.1, Fall 1999; *Jump Cut* 42, 1998; L. K. Pang and D. Wong (eds), *Masculinities and Hong Kong Cinema*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005; and P. Fu and D. Desser (eds), *The Cinema of Hong Kong: History, Arts, Identity*, Cambridge: Cambridge

University Press, 2000. See Law Kar's article in the last volume, 'The American Connection in Early Hong Kong Cinema', for links between Hong Kong and the US film industries in the early twentieth century. Other works that engage more recent transnational flows include: Y. C. Chu, *Hong Kong Cinema: Coloniser, Motherland and Self*, London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003; and E. C. M. Yau (ed.), *At Full Speed: Hong Kong Cinema in a Borderless World*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.

2 L. Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996, p. 101.
3 Ibid.
4 Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, p. 126.
5 Of course, the migration melodrama was represented by Hong Kong born director Wayne Wang before and during this period. Although I do not discuss his films here because they do not take place in New York City, they are important examples of this genre. While Wang is best-known for films such as *The Joy Luck Club* (1993) and *Chinese Box* (1997), many of his early films engage the same themes as the New York melodramas I discuss here from a Hong Kong/West Coast perspective. See *Chan is Missing* (1982); *Dim Sum: a Little Bit of Heart* (1985); *Eat a Bowl of Tea* (1989); and, for a representation of an American man in Hong Kong, see *Life is Cheap … but Toilet Paper is Expensive* (1989).
6 H. Yu, 'How Tiger Woods Lost his Stripes: Post-Nationalist American Studies as a History of Race, Migration, and the Commodification of Culture', in J. C. Rowe (ed.), *Post-Nationalist American Studies*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000, p. 224.
7 Ester C. M. Yau, 'Introduction: Hong Kong Cinema in a Borderless World', in Yau (ed.), *At Full Speed*, p. 2.
8 Ibid., p. 5.
9 Chu, *Hong Kong Cinema*, p. 42.
10 Ibid., p. 51.
11 Law Kar, 'The American Connection in Early Hong Kong Cinema', and David Desser, 'The Kung Fu Craze: Hong Kong Cinema's First American Reception', in Fu and Desser (eds), *The Cinema of Hong Kong*, 19. Yingchi Chu also discusses links between Hollywood and Hong Kong at various stages of the twentieth century in *Hong Kong Cinema*.
12 C. Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945–1961*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003.
13 Lowe, 'Preface', *Immigrant Acts*.
14 S. Fore, 'Life Imitates Entertainment: Home and Dislocation in the Films of Jackie Chan', in Yau (ed.), *At Full Speed*, p. 116.
15 See: www.boxoffice.com/scripts (accessed 1 August 2005).
16 Fore, 'Life Imitates Entertainment', p. 124.
17 S. Teo, *Hong Kong Cinema: the Extra Dimensions*, London: British Film Institute, 1997, p. 148.
18 Stokes and Hoover, *City on Fire*, pp. 97–98.
19 Ibid., p. 98.
20 Ibid., p. 97.
21 Chu, *Hong Kong Cinema*, p. 105.
22 Ibid., pp. 106–7.
23 G. Marchetti, 'Buying American, Consuming Hong Kong', in Fu and Desser (ed.), *The Cinema of Hong Kong*, pp. 308–9.
24 Cui S.Q., 'Stanley Kwan's *Center Stage*: The (Im)Possible Engagement Between Feminism and Postmodernism', in Cheung and Chu (eds), *Between Home and World,* pp. 487–88.
25 G. Marchetti, 'Transnational Exchanges, Questions of Culture, and Global

Cinema: Defining the Dynamics of Changing Relationships', in Yau (ed.), *At Full Speed*, p. 258.
26 Ibid.
27 Stokes and Hoover, *City on Fire*, p. 154.
28 Chu, *Hong Kong Cinema*, p. 106.
29 P. Fonoroff, *At the Hong Kong Movies: 600 Reviews from 1988 till the Handover*, Hong Kong, Film Biweekly, 1998, p. 73.
30 Chu, *Hong Kong Cinema*, p. 108.
31 A. Yue, 'Migration-as-Transition: Pre-Post-1997 Hong Kong Culture in Clara Law's *Autumn Moon*', in Cheung and Chu (eds), *Between Home and World*, p. 230.

4 Hong Kong television in Chinatown: translocal context(s) and transnational social formations

1 Classic examples include Roman Polanski's *Chinatown* (1974), where Chinatown figures most prominently in the film's famous last words, 'Forget it, Jake, it's Chinatown', uttered in the face of an unsolvable mystery. Another example is Michael Cimino's *Year of the Dragon* (1985), which depicts Chinatown as a world of crime and vice. See Ford's essay, Chapter 3, this volume.
2 K. Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada 1875–1980*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991, p. 9.
3 K. Anderson, 'The Idea of Chinatown: the Power of Place and Institutional Practice in the Making of a Racial Category', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 77.4, 1987, p. 581.
4 L. Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996, pp. 27–28.
5 J. Lin, *Reconstructing Chinatown: Ethnic Enclave, Global Change*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1998, p. 15.
6 M. Laguerre, *The Global Ethnopolis: Chinatown, Japantown and Manilatown in American Society*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000, p. 31.
7 Lin, *Reconstructing Chinatown*, p. 17.
8 Ibid., p. 86.
9 D. Palumbo-Liu, *Asia/America: Historical Crossings of the Racial Frontier*, Stanford, CT: Stanford University Press, 1999, pp. 255–79.
10 Sau-Ling Wong characterises denationalisation as (1) 'an easing of cultural nationalist concerns'; (2) a 'growing permeability between "Asian" and "Asian American"'; and (3) a 'shift from a domestic to a diasporic perspective'. See S. L. Wong, 'Denationalization Reconsidered: Asian American Cultural Criticism at a Theoretical Crossroads', in A. Singh and P. Schmidt (eds), *Postcolonial Theory and the United States: Race, Ethnicity, and Literature*, Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2000, pp. 126–32.
11 Hong Kong has long been a privileged site in the Chinese diaspora as a cultural centre responsible for disseminating information and 'Chinese' culture (i.e. news, films, television serials, magazines, etc.) to Chinese communities throughout the world. Hong Kong culture mediates, in a sense, our notions of the Chinese diaspora or what is otherwise known as Greater China.
12 A. Ong and D. Nonini, 'Introduction: Chinese Transnationalism as an Alternative Modernity', in A. Ong and D. Nonini (eds), *Ungrounded Empires: the Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Transnationalism*, New York: Routledge, 1997, p. 4.
13 Ibid., p. 20.
14 K. C. Lo, 'Transnationalization of the Local in Hong Kong Cinema of the 1990s', in E. C. M. Yau (ed.), *At Full Speed: Hong Kong Cinema in a Borderless World*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001, pp. 265–66.

15 See, for example, *Comrades, Almost a Love Story* (dir. Peter Chan, 1996), *An Autumn's Tale* (dir. Mabel Cheung, 1987), *Full Moon in New York* (dir. Stanley Kwan, 1989), *Farewell China* (dir. Clara Law, 1990), and *Wedding Banquet* (dir. Ang Lee, 1993). Elsewhere, Chu has argued that in Hong Kong films about the diaspora, the adopted country functions merely a backdrop for Hong Kongers to recreate Hong Kong in a new abode. See Y. W. Chu, 'Introduction: the Politics of Home, Memory, and Diaspora', in E. M. K. Cheung and Y. W. Chu (eds), *Between Home and World: A Reader in Hong Kong Cinema*, Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. 112–26. On the flipside, in the context of the United States, Stringer has argued that these films 'signify Asian American identities in the process of formation' (p. 302). See J. Stringer, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora in Contemporary Hong Kong Cinema', in D. Y. Hamamoto and S. Liu (eds), *Countervisions: Asian American Film Criticism*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000, pp. 298–312.

16 It is important to note that race and ethnicity are generally studied and understood within national frameworks. In the context of the transnational, race and ethnicity become even more unwieldy and obscured. It is easy, therefore, to assert that these terms no longer matter but I think it is more likely the case that we need new methods in order to think about race transnationally.

17 P. Kwong, 'New York is not Hong Kong: the Little Hong Kong that never was', in R. Skeldon (ed.), *Reluctant Exiles?: Migration from Hong Kong and the New Overseas Chinese*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1994, pp. 256–68.

18 A. Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996, p. 178.

19 Ibid., p. 179.

20 Ibid., pp. 182–84.

21 Ibid., p. 198.

22 Ibid., p.199.

23 B. Lee and E. LiPuma, 'Cultures of Circulation: the Imaginations of Modernity', *Public Culture* 14, 2002, p. 192.

24 Ibid., p. 209.

25 Here, I am speaking specifically about both the melodramatic form of Hong Kong televisual serials and the televisual form itself. However, for the sake of space, I will not elucidate their formal qualities in this paper.

26 I. Grewal and C. Kaplan, 'Introduction: Transnational Feminist Practices and Questions of Postmodernity', in I. Grewal and C. Kaplan (eds), *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994, p. 7.

27 See note [15].

28 Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, p. 35.

29 Ibid.

30 I am borrowing this framework from Colleen Lye's work on Asiatic form. According to Lye, American literary naturalism, whose primary interest was in exposing the evils of capitalism, aimed to represent the abstractions of capital through the creation of paradigmatic social figures. The stereotype of the Asian, therefore, marked naturalism's attempts at *figuring* American capitalism, at representing the unrepresentable. Studying representations of the Asian 'provide[s] a way of recovering the trace of the social relations that race marks' (p. 8). These primarily economic tropes of the Asiatic racial form 'help to explain the primarily economic themes of Asian American racial representation' (p. 11). C. Lye, *America's Asia: Racial Form and American Literature, 1893–1945*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.

31 There is a discrepancy in meaning between the English and Chinese titles. The Chinese title translates roughly as 'Justice does not tolerate feelings (or sentiment)', implying that justice is not compatible with sentimentality.

32 E. Lee, *Gender and Change in Hong Kong: Globalization, Postcolonialism, and Chinese Patriarchy*, Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong Press, 2003.
33 Ibid., p. 7.
34 It is also important to note that Hong Kong was never and could never aspire to be a nation. Therefore, national consciousness was never a constitutive part of the Hong Kong imaginary despite the fact that many have expressed patriotic feelings towards China.
35 Here, I am drawing an analogy between the colonial apparatuses used in governing Hong Kong and the state apparatuses at work in Chinatown.
36 Cf., Lo, op. cit.
37 That is, the relationship between Hong Kong and Chinatown is grounded in their different relationship to modernity, as understood teleologically. Hong Kong's successful modernization becomes the standard against which Chinatown's is measured. Certainly, while a popular sentiment, to frame modernity in terms of progress and teleology occludes the other ways in which Hong Kong and Chinatown might interpret their relationship (i.e. as transnational public sphere, diasporic community, a part of Greater China, or bound through cultural nationalism, etc.). Furthermore, whether or not this temporal gap actually exists is highly debatable and would require more empirical research to fully develop. Nevertheless, by amplifying Hong Kong and Chinatown's disjunctive modernities (though understood teleologically), the circulation of Hong Kong culture tells us this: that the diaspora is not a unified whole as it is often represented but always internally fractured. This calls for more comparative work to be done within the diaspora (i.e. internal relationships and how they have changed over time in different locations). Since the diaspora is often located within the cusp of the national and global, this kind of study also promises to provide insights into the changing terms of their relationship.
38 Geen's ex-girlfriend is Wan Yi's niece who lived with them for a period. They date for a short time before he gets together with Guan. They break up after Geen goes to jail for a crime his brother commits. As a dutiful brother, he bails Hong out for what he says would be the last time. When Wan Yi disappears during a trip to Malaysia, Geen goes looking for her and elicits his ex-girlfriend's help. This scene occurs as she goes looking for him at the train station.
39 He could not simply break her heart and leave her because he wants to maintain his appearance as a gentleman.
40 Guan and Geen finally marry and have a baby son together. Geen runs a very successful restaurant business and later inherits Guan's family business after her father passed away. For a period, they lead a very happy and comfortable life together.
41 Geen goes to jail for a crime his brother commits (running a man over with a car). After he is released, he gets together with his ex-prison-mates and opens up a very successful restaurant, which he later expands.
42 R. Chow, 'The Secrets of Ethnic Abjection', in M. Morris and B. de Bary (eds), *'Race' Panic and the Memory of Migration*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2001, pp. 53–77.
43 K. Shimakawa, *National Abjection: the Asian American Body Onstage*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002.
44 D. Eng and D. Kazanjian, 'Introduction', in D. Eng and D. Kanzanjian (eds), *Loss: the Politics of Mourning*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003, p. 2.
45 However, it is important we do not romanticise the ghostliness of the women for the text also gestures towards the material conditions that render women invisible in the first place. As such, we must always think about the ephemeral dimensions as well as the materiality of the ghost and of the work it does.
46 Ong and Nonini, op. cit., p. 17.

47 This is not to minimise the complexity of the ways in which individuals receive and interpret televisual representations. Reception contexts are never homogenous and individual accounts will certainly complicate and nuance any of the generalisations put forth in this essay. I leave this aside as my focus is not about the ethnographic but the textual.

5 Thailand in the Hong Kong cinematic imagination

1 On the varied fortunes of Hong Kong films in Thailand, see Pimpaka Towira, 'Kung Fu Crisis', *The Nation* (Thailand) (23 February 1999) and Sa-nguan Khumrungroj, 'Chinatown Star Fades as Film Hub', *The Nation* (Thailand) (30 January 2000).
2 On the Chinese in Thailand, see, for example, J. Rigg, 'Exclusion and Embeddedness: the Chinese in Thailand and Vietnam', in L. J. C. Ma and C. Cartier (eds), *The Chinese Diaspora: Space, Place, Mobility, and Identity*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003, pp. 97–115.
3 Law Kar and F. Bren, *Hong Kong Cinema: a Cross-Cultural View*, Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2004, pp. 207–08.
4 *Horoscope 2: The Woman from Hell*, *another Hong Kong Movie Page*: www.kowloonside.com/movies/horoscope2.html (accessed 19 January 2004).
5 *The Hong Kong Happy Man*, *another Hong Kong Movie Page*: www.kowloonside.com/movies/thehongkonghappyman.html (accessed 31 March 2004).
6 S. Hammond, *Hollywood East: Hong Kong Movies and the People who Make them*, Chicago, IL: Contemporary Books, 2000, pp. 106–07.
7 While the majority of films to be discussed here are purely Hong Kong-financed productions, several Hong Kong co-productions in which there is clearly substantial creative and administrative input from Hong Kong personnel will be discussed as well.
8 In a sequel, *The Angry Guest* (1972), this Bangkok-Hong Kong opposition still obtains, but with Tokyo added as a third city, figured as more modern still than Hong Kong.
9 For a classic study of the aquatic roots of Thai culture, see Sumet Jumsai, *Naga: Cultural Origins in Siam and the West Pacific*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.
10 These two surprisingly gay-friendly 2004 films have quite a number of striking similarities, which space precludes from exploring more fully here. In both films, familial obligations and mistaken identities precipitate paralleled negotiations and redefinitions across boundaries of nation, gender, and sexuality.
11 To extend this allegory further: If there are 'real' Thai ghosts here, they are the ghosts of unseen Thai personnel (along with unseen settings and equipment), invisible figures the traces of whom may hardly be detectable in the completed films. This is perhaps most strongly the case for those Hong Kong films that are shot in part in Thailand with Thai labour, but which include no character or space recognisable as Thai within their narrative discourse: for example, the recent Hong Kong-Hollywood co-production *The Medallion* (2003). In the instance of that film, these Thai people (and settings) interestingly make their spectral return on the DVD, where, in 40 minutes of behind-the-scenes footage, they can be seen meeting the needs of their Hong Kong employers.

6 Hong Kong-Australian imaginaries: Three Australian films by Clara Law

1 T. O'Regan, *Australian National Cinema*, London: Routledge, 1996, p. 330.
2 M. Roxburgh, 'Clara Law's *Floating Life* and Australian Identity', *Metro* 110, 1997, pp. 3–6.

3 R. Siemienowicz, 'Globalisation and Home Values in New Australian Cinema', *Journal of Australian Studies*, December 1999, pp. 49–56.
4 F. Collins, 'Bringing the Ancestors Home', in D. Verhoeven (ed.), *Twin Peeks: Australian and New Zealand Feature Films*, Melbourne: Damned, 1999, pp. 112, 114, 115.
5 D. Eng, 'Melancholia/Postcoloniality: Loss in *The Floating Life* (sic)', *Qui Parle* 11.2, 1999, pp. 137–50, 161–64.
6 T. Mitchell, 'Boxing the 'Roo: Clara Law's *Floating Life* and Transnational Hong Kong-Australian Identities', *UTS Review* 6.2, November 2000, pp. 103–14; T. Mitchell, 'Clara Law's *Floating Life* and Hong-Kong Australian "Flexible Citizenship"', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 26.2, March 2003, pp. 278–300.
7 D. Pettman, 'The Floating Life of Fallen Angels: Unsettled Communities and Hong Kong Cinema', *Postcolonial Studies* 3.1, 2000, p. 75.
8 A. Yue, 'Asian Australian Cinema, Asian-Australian Modernity', in Helen Gilbert *et al.* (eds), *Diaspora: Negotiating Asian-Australia*, Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 2000, pp. 195–96.
9 K. Louie, '*Floating Life*: Nostalgia for the Confucian Way in Suburban Sydney', in C. Berry (ed.), *Chinese Films in Focus*, London: British Film Institute, 2003, pp. 97–103.
10 R. Jones, 'Framing Strategies: Floating Life and the Limits of "Australian Cinema"', in L. French (ed.), *Womenvison: Women and the Moving Image in Australia*, Melbourne: Danmed, 2003, pp. 254, 255.
11 L. Ma, 'Reconciliation between Generations and Cultures: Clara Law's Film *Floating Life*', in Wenche Ommundsen (ed.), *Bastard Moon: Essays on Chinese-Australian Writing, Otherland Literary Journal* 7, July 2001, pp. 57–68.
12 C. Law, *Director's Statement, Pardo Film Festival* (1996): www.pardo.ch/1996/festival96/floatingreg.html (accessed 14 May 1998).
13 A. Appadurai, 'Full Attachment', *Public Culture* 10.2, Winter 1998, p. 449.
14 See, for example, D. Stratton, *Review of Floating Life* (1998): www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/film, and A. Fung, *Review of Floating Life* (1998): www.ncf.carleton.ca (both accessed 14 May 1998).
15 H. Wang and T. Mitchell, *Interview with Clara Law and Eddie Fong* (Melbourne), 30 June 2000, p. 12.
16 Pettman, 'The Floating Life of Fallen Angels', p. 76.
17 Yue, 'Asian Australian Cinema, Asian-Australian Modernity', p. 195.
18 See T. Mitchell, 'Migration, Memory, and Transitional Identities in Clara Law's *Autumn Moon*', *Cultural Studies Review* 9.1, May 2003, pp. 139–60.
19 S. Teo, '*Floating Life*: the Heaviness of Moving', *Senses of Cinema* 12 (February–March 2001): www.sensesofcinema.com/contents.01/12/floating.html (accessed 19 January 2004).
20 S. Kraicer, *Review of Floating Life at the 1996 Toronto International Film Festival*: www.geocities.com/Tokyo/5170/floating.html (accessed 14 May 1998).
21 Louie, '*Floating Life*', p. 102.
22 Hu X. C., 'From *Floating Life* to *Comrades: Almost a Love Story*: Here or there, Home and Homesickness', *Film Appreciation Journal* (Taipei) 6, 1997, p. 45 (trans. Hai Yan Wang).
23 Li Y. M., 'Review of *Floating Life*', *Imagekeeper* (Taipei) 1, 1997, p.68 (trans. Hai Yan Wang).
24 F. Dannen and B. Long, *Hong Kong Babylon: an Insider's Guide to the Hollywood of the East*, London: Faber and Faber, 1997, p. 109.
25 C. Law, 'Diary Entry' 3 (2003): www.letterstoali.com/diary.html (accessed 8 June 2005).
26 In Wang and Mitchell, 'Interview with Clara Law and Eddie Fong'.
27 Pettman, 'The Floating Life of Fallen Angels', p. 75.

28 R. Phillips, 'Confused and Cold-hearted', *World Socialist Web Site* (30 April 2001), p. 1, 3, 4: www.wsws.org/articles/2001/apr2001/godd-a30.shtml (accessed 19 January 2004).
29 F. A. Villella, 'Materialism and Spiritualism in *The Goddess of 1967*', *Senses of Cinema* 13 (2001), pp. 1, 3, 8: www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/01/13/goddess.html (accessed 4 December 2001).
30 O. Khoo, 'The Sacrificial Asian in Australian Film', *Real Time* 59, February–March 2004, p. 15.
31 M. Walsh, 'The Year of the Pisstake', *RealTime* 58, December 2003/January 2004, p. 20.
32 C. Law, *An Interview with Clara Law* (2001): www.palace.net.au/goddess/clara.htm, p. 1 (accessed 19 January 2004).
33 P. Thompson, *Review of* The Goddess of 1967 (22 April 2001): Sunday.ninemsn.com.au/Sunday/film_reviews/article_796.asp, p. 1 (accessed 19 January 2004).
34 Villella, 'Materialism and Spiritualism in *The Goddess of 1967*', p. 1.
35 R. Barthes, 'The New Citroën', *Mythologies*, London: Paladin, 1973, p. 26.
36 D. Stratton, '*Cinema Review:* The Goddess of 1967' (2001): www.20.sbs.com.au/movieshow/index.php?action=review&id=682 (accessed 19 January 2004).
37 Villella, 'Materialism and Spiritualism in *The Goddess of 1967*', p. 2.
38 K. Millard, 'An Interview with Clara Law', *Senses of Cinema* (2001): www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/01/13/law.html, p. 3 (accessed 4 December 2001),
39 A. Kavanagh, *The Goddess of 1967* (2003): www.mcc.murdoch.edu.au/ReadingRoom/film/dbase/2003/goddess/htm, pp. 6, 7. (accessed 19 January 2004).
40 Ibid.
41 E. McCredie, 'Clara Law: an Impression of Permanence', *Real Time* 43 (2001): www.realtimearts.net/rt43.mccredie.html (accessed 19 January 2004).
42 T. Kirbi, 'Letter Writing to a Young Asylum Seeker Leads Trish Kirbi to Travel with her Family to Port Hedland and Meet the Boy who Calls her Mum': www.letterstoali.com/article.html, p. 2. (accessed 20 July 2004).
43 C. Law, 'Why I Made this Film' (2003): www.letterstoali.com/why.html (accessed 20 July 2004).
44 S. Hall, 'The Silence of a Teenage Asylum Seeker Speaks Volumes', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 September 2004.
45 E. Williams, 'Ali Delivers a Moral Blow', *The Weekend Australian*, 25–26 September, 2004, R23.
46 R. Phillips, 'A Sincere and Evocative Protest', *World Socialist Web Site* (2004): www.wsws.org/articles/2004/oct2004/law1-o11.shtml, pp. 3–4 (accessed 11 October 2004).
47 A. Delaney, 'No Time to Wait', *RealTime* 64, January/February 2005, p. 20.
48 C. Law, 'Why I Made This Film', op. cit..
49 R. Phillips, 'Australia's Inhuman Treatment of Asylum Seekers has to be Confronted' (Clara Law speaks with WSWS) (11 October 2004): www.wsws.org/articles/2004/oct2004/law2-o11_prn.shtml, p. 2 (accessed 12 September 2005).
50 Phillips, 'A Sincere and Evocative Protest', 4.1
51 Phillips interview, 'Australia's Inhuman Treatment', 11 October 2004, op, cit., p. 3.

7 Generic ghosts: remaking the new 'Asian horror film'

1 I wrote this essay while on sabbatical research leave from the Film and Media Studies Department at the University of California, Irvine. During my sabbatical I was Visiting Fellow at the University of the Philippines Film Institute and Visiting Scholar at the Cultural Center of the Philippines. For financial support during this period, I gratefully acknowledge grant assistance from UCI's Inter-

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2 Derrida writes:

> Repetition and first time: this is perhaps the question of the event as question of the ghost. *What is* a ghost? What is the *effectivity* or the *presence* of a specter, that is, of what seems to remain as ineffective, virtual, insubstantial as a simulacrum? … Repetition *and* first time, but also repetition *and* last time, since the singularity of any *first time* makes of it also a *last time*.
> (J. Derrida, *Specters of Marx: the State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. P. Kamuf, New York: Routledge, 1994, p. 10.)

3 R. Altman, *Film/Genre*, London: British Film Institute, 1999, p. 26.

4 P. Aufderheide, 'Made in Hong Kong: Translation and Transmutation', in Andrew Horton and Stuart Y. McDougal (eds), *Play it Again, Sam: Retakes on Remakes*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998, p. 193.

5 S. Rose, 'Nightmare Scenario: Hollywood Horror Is Creatively Dead but Asian Films Are Reviving the Genre', *The Guardian*, 20 September, 2002, p. 11.

6 D. Rooney, 'Remake Wranglers Mine Asia, South America', *Variety* 391.9, 21–27 July 2003, p. 14.

7 A. Richards, '*The Eye*' *Time Out*, 25 September 2002, p. 80.

8 Some accounts date the beginning of this trend to Dreamworks' purchase of remake rights to Hideo Nakata's 1998 Japanese horror film *Ringu* in 2001; others to Miramax's acquisition of remake rights to Jo Jing-yu's South Korean action-comedy *My Wife is a Gangster* in the same year. See T. Friend, 'Remake Man', *The New Yorker*, 2 June 2003, pp. 43–44; and D. Chute, 'Spotlight: Pusan Film Festival: Hollywood Catches Case of Remake Fever', *Variety* 392.7, 29 September–5 October 2003, p. C1.

9 What follows is a partial list of Asian films – not confined to horror films alone – whose remake rights have been optioned by Hollywood studios. The list is organised by studio. Some of these remakes have been completed and released, while others are still in development. Dreamworks: *Ringu*, Japan, 1998; *Ringu 2*, Japan, 1999; *My Sassy Girl*, South Korea, 2001; and *Tale of Two Sisters*, South Korea, 2003. Miramax: *My Wife is a Gangster*, South Korea, 2001; and *Shall We Dance?*, Japan, 1996; Dimension: *Teacher Mister Kim*, South Korea, 2003; and *Jail Breakers*, South Korea, 2003; Warner Brothers: *Infernal Affairs*, Hong Kong, 2002; *Il Mare*, South Korea, 2000; *Marrying the Mafia*, South Korea, 2002; and *Akira*, Japan, 1988. United Artists: *The Cure*, Japan, 1997. Universal: *Chaos*, Japan, 1999. Radar Pictures: *Turn*, Japan, 2001. Paramount: *The Eye*, Hong Kong, 2002; (with Sam Raimi and Senator International) *Ju-on*, 2000; and *Ikiru*, Japan, 1952; MGM: *Hi Dharma*, South Korea, 2001; Fox: *Afterlife*, Japan, 1998; and *Tell Me Something*, South Korea, 1999.

10 R. Lyman, 'The Chills! The Thrills! The Profits!', *The New York Times*, 31 August 1999, p. 1.

11 C. Dunkley, '"H"wood's Fright-Geist: Studios Add New Twists to their Scare Tactics', *Variety* 388.12, 4 November 2002, pp. 1–3. Dunkley mentions the following releases: *They* (2002), *Ghost Ship* (2002), *Van Helsing* (2004), *Darkness Falls* (2003), *The Exorcist: the Beginning* (2004); *Dreamcatcher* (2003); *Jeepers Creepers 2* (2001); *Gothica* (2003), *Freddy vs. Jason* (2003), *Final Destination 2* (2003), *Highwaymen* (2003), and remakes of *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (2003) and *Willard* (2003).
12 M. Kermode, 'What a Carve Up!', *Sight and Sound* 13.12, December 2003, pp. 12–16. The films Kermode mentions include remakes (*Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, 2003; *Dawn of the Dead*, 2004; *Amityville Horror*, 2005); re-releases: (*Alien: the Director's Cut*, 2003; *The Exorcist: the Version you've Never Seen*, 2000); sequelisations of 1970s horror classics (*Land of the Dead*, 2005); and 1980s remakes of 1950s horror (*The Fly*, 1986; *The Thing*, 1982).
13 Dunkley, '"H"wood's Fright-Geist', p. 1.
14 C. S. Dunkley, 'Cannes Preview: Beachy Keen', *Variety* 394.12, 3–9 May 2004, p. B1; see also C. Klein, 'The Asia Factor in Global Hollywood', *Yale Global* (25 March 2003): www.yaleglobal.yale.edu (accessed 16 August 2005).
15 D. McNary, 'Remakes Need a Makeover: H'wood Steps up its Updates, but Idea is Far from Surefire', *Variety* 391.9, 21 July 2003, pp. 9–10.
16 M. Harris, 'You Can't Kill the Boogeyman', *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 32.3, Fall 2004, pp. 98–99.
17 Friend, 'Remake Man', pp. 40–47.
18 For an example of such exceptionalist rhetoric, see T. Rafferty, 'Why Asian Ghost Stories are the Best', *New York Times*, 8 June 2003, p. 13. Renee Graham, reviewing *Tale of Two Sisters*, writes: 'There's a reason why Hollywood has been so busy in recent years remaking Asian horror movies. Scare for scare, they're generally better, relying more on things-that-go-bump-in-the-night suspense than the blood-splattered gorefests that overwhelm so many contemporary American films'. 'R. Graham, "Two Sisters" Truly Frightens, Without The Gore', *The Boston Globe*, 25 February 2005, p. D5. See also S. C. Ong, 'Horrifying Thoughts; Asian Horror Films Resonate because they are Closer to Home and Acknowledge Cultural Myths and Folklore', *The Straits Times*, Life section, 27 November 2004, via LexisNexis (accessed 26 July 2005).
19 C. Gledhill, 'Rethinking Genre', in Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (eds), *Reinventing Film Studies*, London: Arnold, 2000, p. 227.
20 Ibid., pp. 229–30.
21 Ibid., p. 226.
22 Altman, *Film/Genre*, pp. 207–8.
23 Analysing Hong Kong film via a national cinema paradigm is always problematic, not least because of Hong Kong's pre-1997 positioning as a territory 'between two colonizers' (as Rey Chow puts it) and its post-1997 status as a Special Administrative Region upon the handover to Mainland China. See R. Chow, 'Between Colonizers: Hong Kong's Postcolonial Self-writing in the 1990s', *Diaspora* 2.2, 1992, pp. 151–70.
24 C. H. Y. Wong, 'Cities, Cultures and Cassettes: Hong Kong Cinema and Transnational Audiences', *Postscript: Essays in Film and the Humanities* (Special Edition: Hong Kong Cinema), 19.1, Fall 1999, pp.102–04.
25 David Desser writes that when the kung fu craze spearheaded by Bruce Lee movies subsided, a deracinated martial arts genre continued to be popular in late 1970s American Vietnam War films. According to Desser, such films saw 'the rise of white male martial arts stars who, in a sense, co-opt Asian martial arts for the American action hero, for the American movie star, for the American man'. See D. Desser, 'The Kung Fu Craze: Hong Kong Cinema's First American Reception', in P. Fu and D. Desser (eds), *The Cinema of Hong Kong: History, Arts, Identity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 39.

26 'Ironically, when *Iron Monkey* came out in Hong Kong, that film style was going down', says the film's star Donnie Yen, 'But Woo-ping's fight standards are so high'. 'Hollywood Embraces Three Legenday Hong Kong Film Directors', *China Daily* (25 October 2001): www.china.org.cn/english/2001/Oct/21197.htm (8 November 2005).

27 Teo argues that this reduction of Hong Kong cinema to *wuxia* overlooks achievements in other genres, especially the *wenyi* (realistic, socially conscious) melodrama acclaimed by local critics. Subsequently banned by the Guomindang government of pre-World War II China, the *wuxia* was revived in postwar Hong Kong, where it soon became a generic staple. See S. Teo, 'Hong Kong's Electric Shadow Show: from Survival to Discovery', in K. Law (ed.), *Fifty Years of Electric Shadows, Proceedings of the 21st Hong Kong International Film Festival*, Hong Kong: Urban Council of Hong Kong, 1997, pp. 19 and 24. For more on Hollywood's 'selective uptake' of Hong Kong cinema, see S. Cheung, 'Hong Kong Filmmakers in Hollywood: Terence Chang', trans. B. Cheng, pp. 130–31. According to Cheung,

> When Hong Kong cinema was in fashion in Hollywood, many directors made the US debuts; and stars like Chow Yun-Fat and Michelle Yeoh were cast as leads in Hollywood A-productions. The Hong Kong style of action has been adopted in the hugely popular *The Matrix*, choreographed by Yuen Woo-ping, setting off a new 'kung fu craze'. However, this by no means shows that Hollywood has accepted Asians and Chinese language films; only that it is being very selective about certain elements of Hong Kong cinema.

28 R. Corliss, 'Go West, Hong Kong: John Woo and Jackie Chan Meet Hollywood', *Time* 147.9, 26 February 1996, p. 67.

29 D. Elley, 'South Korea: Local Hitmakers Eye Global Breakouts', *Variety* 385.3, 3–9 December 2001, pp. 20, 25.

30 Ibid.

31 R. Corliss, 'Horror: Made in Japan', *Time* 164.5, 2 August 2004, p. 76.

32 D. Wills, 'The French Remark: *Breathless* and Cinematic Citationality', in Andrew Horton and Stuart Y. McDougal (eds), *Play it Again, Sam*, pp. 148–49.

33 J. Derrida, 'What is a "Relevant" Translation?', trans. L. Venuti, *Critical Inquiry* 27.2, Winter 2001, p. 175.

34 Y. Y. Yeh and D. W. Davis, 'Japan Hongscreen: Pan-Asian Cinemas and Flexible Accumulation', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television* 22. 1, 2002, pp. 61–62.

35 Ibid., pp. 61–65.

36 Ibid., p. 66.

37 Chute, D. 'Spotlight: Pusan Film Festival: Hollywood Catches Case of Remake Fever', pp. C1, C3.

38 D. Chute, 'East Goes West', *Variety* 394.13, 10–16 May 2004, p. 10.

39 W. Kan, 'Reconstruction Project: Filmmakers Focus on Revamping Biz', *Variety* 386.11, 29 April 2002, pp. A1–A2.

40 Quoted in Chute, 'East Goes West', p. 10.

41 Cheung, S. Y. 'Hong Kong Filmmakers in Hollywood: Peter Chan Ho-Sun', pp. 134–35, 137.

42 Directors John Woo, Tsui Hark, Ringo Lam, Stanley Tong, Peter Chan; actors Jackie Chan and Chow Yun-Fat; Producer Terence Chang; and action choreographers Yuen Woo-ping, Corey Yuen, and Yuen Cheung-yan. See Ibid., p. 129.

43 M. Featherstone, 'Localism, Globalism, and Cultural Identity', in R. Wilson and W. Dissanayake (eds), *Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996, pp. 60–61.

44 T. Miller, 'Screening the Nation: Rethinking Options', *Cinema Journal* 38.4, Summer 1999, p. 94.

45 T. Miller, N. Govil, J. McMurria, R. Maxwell, and T. Wang, *Global Hollywood 2*, London: British Film Institute, 2005, p. 80.
46 Gledhill, 'Rethinking Genre', p. 230.
47 T. Rayns, '*The Eye*', *Sight & Sound* 12.11, November 2002, p. 43–44.
48 K. Rithdee, 'Bangkok Journal: Kong Rithdee on Cinematic Renewal in Thailand', *Film Comment* 38.5, September–October 2002, pp. 12–13.
49 D. Elley, 'Film Reviews: a Tale of Two Sisters', *Variety* 391.8, 14–20 July 2003, pp. 24–25.
50 Yeh and Davis 'Japan Hongscreen', p. 67.
51 Ibid., p.78
52 Reviews suggest that such films, regardless of national origin, are received within a shared generic field. A Malaysian film critic writes, 'If you liked *The Eye*, you'd definitely like *Dark Water*. Language barriers don't matter when you're gripping the sides of your chair with knuckles turned white'. The same writer also plays down language differences by recourse to the shared horizon of affect: 'Though the movie is Japanese, the English subtitles will take you through the story effectively. And besides, most of the eerie bits take place when no one is speaking'. R. Omar, '*Dark Water*', *New Straits Times*, 13 September 2002, p 6.
53 Yeh and Davis, 'Japan Hongscreen', pp. 63–78.
54 Chute, 'East Goes West', p. 10.
55 See *The New Yorker's* profile of Grady Hendrix, a co-founder of the New York Asian Film Festival:

> J-horror has become more and more mainstream, with several big-budget Hollywood remakes scheduled to open this year, which may well spell the end of Hendrix's film series, since he will no longer be able to wrest festival rights from the studios.
>
> (M. Agger, 'The Pictures: Gross and Grosser', *The New Yorker* 80.17, 28 June 2004, pp. 37–38)

56 Altman, *Film/Genre*, p. 211.
57 See S. Fore, 'Jackie Chan and the Cultural Dynamics of Global Entertainment', in S. H. P. Lu (ed.), *Transnational Chinese Cinemas*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997, pp. 239–62.
58 P. Budra, and B. A. Schellenberg, 'Introduction', in P. Budra and B. A. Schellenberg (eds), *Part Two: Reflections on the Sequel*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press., 1998, p. 11. Mikhail Bakhtin writes that language is 'heteroglot from top to bottom', embodying 'the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past'. M. M. Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', in M. Holquist (ed.), Emerson and M. Holquist (trans.), *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981, p. 291.
59 A. Higson, 'The Concept of National Cinema', *Screen* 30.4, Autumn 1989, pp. 38–39.
60 Ibid., p. 41.
61 Klein, 'The Asia Factor in Global Hollywood', op. cit..
62 T. Miller, 'Hollywood and the World', in J. Hill *et al*. (eds), *Oxford Guide to Film Studies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 371.
63 I. Garger, 'Selling Screams: a New Generation of Filmmakers is Turning Once Lowly Asian Horror into a Hot Global Commodity', *Time International*, Asia Edition, 164.22, 29 November 2004, p. 49.
64 J. Kim, 'Biz Pines for Summer Horror Hits', *Variety* 396.3, 6 September 2004, p. 14.
65 Plagued by rampant piracy, regional economic crisis, a sharp decline in local movie attendance, and the defeat of Hong Kong films by Hollywood fare in its

own backyard, the Hong Kong film industry in the late 1990s was in dire straits, a circumstance aggravated by the migration of its brightest talents. Whereas there used to be 200 local films screened a year in Hong Kong, in 1997 and 1998 this dropped to about 90, so the film industry went from dominating 80 per cent of the local film market to less than half that amount. The unemployment rate in the film industry soared to 70 per cent at its worst, but in 2001 the *South China Morning Post* announced that the industry was on its way to recovery, with local films screened rising to 150 and several new government services and funds established to help the ailing industry. See K. C. Lo, 'Transnationalization of the Local in Hong Kong Cinema of the 1990s', in. E. C. M. Yau (ed.), *At Full Speed: Hong Kong Cinema in a Borderless World*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minessota Press, 2001, pp. 262, 265. See also See E. Lee, 'Scene Set for Reel Recovery', *South China Morning Post*, 15 February 2001, p. 15; and L. Leung, 'SAR Film-Makers Prepare for Boom Year as Budgets Rise', *South China Morning Post*, 7 January 2002, p. 1.

66 Yeh, and Davis, 'Japan Hongscreen', pp. 75–77.

67 S. Fore, 'Home, Migration, Identity: Hong Kong Film Workers Join the Diaspora', in K. Law (ed.), *Fifty Years of Electric Shadows: Proceedings of the 21st Hong Kong International Film Festival*, Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1997, p. 130.

68 Klein, 'The Asia Factor in Global Hollywood', op. cit..

69 Miller *et al.*, *Global Hollywood 2*, p. 79.

8 Copies of copies in Hollywood and Hong Kong cinemas: rethinking the woman-warrier figures

1 This observation can be extended to popular American TV programmes as well, for instance, *Xena Warrior Princess* (aired 1995–2001), *Alias* (2002–), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–), *La Femme Nikita* (1997–2001), and *Dark Angel* (2000–2002). For analysis of the women warrior figure in the 1990s American television culture, see S. A. Inness, *Tough Girls: Women Warriors and Wonder Women in Popular Culture*, Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999; F. Early and K. Kennedy (eds), *Athena's Daughters: Television's New Women Warriors*, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003; D. Heinecken, *The Warrior Women of Television: a Feminist Cultural Analysis of the New Female Body in Popular Media*, New York: Peter Lang, 2003; S. A. Inness (ed.), *Action Chicks: New Images of Tough Women in Popular Culture*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004; 'Vamp(ire)s and those who Kill them: Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Dana Scully', in S. Kord and E. Krimmer, *Hollywood Divas, Indie Queens, and TV Heroines: Contemporary Screen Images of Women*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005, pp. 141–59.

2 First appearing in Mandarin martial arts features, Yu was the queen of Cantonese martial arts films. Between 1948 and 1966, she starred in more than two hundred films that can be roughly divided into three categories: martial arts films, Cantonese opera films and detective thrillers. 'Yellow Oriole' was the character she played in the detective thrillers, *Three Female Secret Agents* (1960) and *The Dragon and the Secret Pearl* (1966).

3 Nan Hong played the female Robin Hood-type thief with Chan Po-chu as her sidekick in *Black Rose* (1965) and *Who is that Rose?*(aka *Spy with My Face*) (1966). Both films were directed by Chor Yuen (Chu Yuan) who later became Nan Hong's husband.

4 The other thrillers include *Lady in Distress* and *The Magic Cat*, in which Chan played a fighting heroine. Both were released in 1966. Chan also played similar role in other action movies like *The Number One Female Detective* (1967) and swordswoman roles in many costume supernatural martial-arts films of the

sixties. She appeared in more than two hundred martial arts films between 1958 and 1972.

5 For a detailed discussion on the action heroines in Hong Kong cinema of the 1980s, see my 'Fighting Female Masculinity: Women Warriors and their Foreignness in Hong Kong Action Cinema of the 1980s', in L. K. Pang and D. Wong (eds), *Masculinities and Hong Kong Cinema*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005, pp. 137–54.

6 See Lisa Odham Stokes and Michael Hoover, *City on Fire: Hong Kong Cinema*, London: Verso, 1999, p. 309. Jackie Chan has once proudly said that Steven Spielberg's *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984) has copied the bicycle sequence and stunt from his *Project A* (1983), whereas Chan modestly admitted that he likewise learned from American stuntmen. It is also a well-known secret that Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* (1992) has almost copied, shot by shot, Ringo Lam's *City on Fire* (1987). Tarantino's *Kill Bill* is also a direct borrowing from many Shaw Brothers' martial arts movies. For a detailed discussion on how *Kill Bill* copies ideas from Hong Kong action cinema, see L. K. Pang, 'Copying *Kill Bill*', *Social Text* 83, Summer 2005, pp. 133–53.

7 D. Desser, 'The Martial Arts Film in the 1990s', in W. W. Dixon (ed.), *Film Genre 2000: New Critical Essays*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000, p. 81.

8 The view that 'women warriors were no longer the same' is more commonly held by feminists who generally oppose violence that is defined as patriarchal, oppressive and macho, and who label violent women as 'masculinist, phallic women' as if they only reproduce male domination.

9 It is true that filmic use of violent women can both elide and express antagonism. As Hilary Neroni points out, 'the representation of the violent woman is either ideological or revolutionary on the basis of the relation it takes up to antagonism. Its relation to antagonism is the key to understanding the political valence of violence'. See Neronic, *The Violent Woman: Femininity, Narrative, and Violence in Contemporary American Cinema*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005, p. 11.

10 A bond girl in *The Man with the Golden Gun* (1974), Yuen Qiu was trained to spin, kick and flick at the Peking Opera School run by Yu Zhanyuan since she was seven. Her classmates included Jackie Chan, Sammo Hung and Yuen Biao.

11 Both were big budget productions, with *Hero* becoming costliest production for a mainland Chinese film. (But the record has been broken by Chen Kaige's US$ 30 million fantasy epic *The Promise* [2005].) They have a transnational Chinese cast: Jet Li, Tony Leung, Maggie Cheung, Donnie Yen, Zhang Ziyi in *Hero*, and Andy Lau, Takeshi Kaneshiro and Zhang Ziyi in *House of Flying Daggers*. They also have an international production crew featuring *Crouching Tiger*'s Oscar-winning composer Tan Dun and cinematographer Chris Doyle. The two films are usually seen as copycats of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Drago*n, though Zhang has denied this on many occasions, maintaining that he has always wanted to make a *wuxia* movie, and that he had been hunting for suitable script writers for many years. He had also wanted to adapt a Jin Yong or Gu Long novel. However, the adaptation did not work well, so he decided to handle the script himself. This took him about three years. By the time his film script was done, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* had already been released.

12 Following the international success of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Drago*n, Zhang's *Hero* and *House of Flying Daggers* have not only broken China's box-office records, but have together grossed more than US$190 million overseas.

13 The film, set right before the birth of a united Chinese nation in the Warring States, tells a story about how King of Qin, who later becomes the first Chinese emperor, aims to unify China, while the assassins are all caught between their

loyalty to their own states and their understanding of the utmost significance of the national unification envisioned by King of Qin. For years, the separate kingdoms have fought ruthlessly for supremacy, with consequences for the common people who have to endure decades of social turmoil. To stop all wars the notion of unification comes to the fore, that is, one China with all states coming under the jurisdiction of one ruler. The theme of unification of course reminds us of the present claims of China's sovereignty over Taiwan, Hong Kong and various places. Hence *Hero* is suspected of political complicity with the ideology of unification.

14 Ironically, only the most radical or enthusiastic orthodox followers can really subvert the ruling ideology by taking it more literally than it can take itself, and thus render the ideology not functional. On the contrary, ideology can have a hold on us only when we experience that we are not entirely under its control.

15 See D. Barboza, 'Hollywood Movie Studios See the Chinese Film Market as Their Next Rising Star', *The New York Times* (4 July 2005): www.nytimes.com/auth/login?URI=http://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/04/business/media/04film.html&OQ=exQ3D1121140800Q26enQ3D600c9f851e490c74Q26eiQ3D5070Q26emcQ3Deta1&OP=117414eQ2F3gPt3H8Q5CxM88Q7D030hhk3hQ5B3hy3tqxQ51Q5DPxx3,PHQ51Q5E3hycQ51J,R_Q7D,J (accessed 5 July 2005).

16 For a more detailed discussion on her femme fatale role in *Crouching Tiger*, see my 'Tigers Crouch and Dragons Hide in the New Trans-Chinese Cinema', *Chinese Face/Off: the Transnational Popular Culture of Hong Kong*, Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2005.

17 In Laura Mulvey's argument, audiences tend to use 'sadistic voyeurism' to demystify the mystery of the woman, ascertain her guilt, force her to change, defeat her, assert control over her and subject her through punishment or forgiveness, for example, the femme fatale in *film noir*, or 'fetishistic scopophilia' by turning her into a fetish object so that she becomes reassuring rather than dangerous (hence overvaluation, the cult of female star). See L. Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen* 16.3, 1975, pp. 6–18.

9 The Noir East: Hong Kong filmmakers' transmutation of a Hollywood genre?

1 An early version of this essay was presented at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, on 23 February 1999. I wish to thank the School of Communication Studies at NTU for their support.

2 See L. C. H Lai, 'Film and Enigmatization: Nostalgia, Nonsense, and Remembering', in E. C. M. Yau (ed.), *At Full Speed: Hong Kong Cinema in a Borderless World*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001, pp. 231–50.

3 R. Durgnat, 'The Family Tree of *Film Noir*', *Film Comment*, November–December 1974, pp. 6–7.

4 The question of whether these films actually constitute a genre has exercised scholars for years. A number of critics have argued that *film noir* does not fit the definition of a genre because a genre is defined by setting and conventions – e.g., as in the Western, the musical – whereas the only attribute that is truly universal in *film noir* is tone or attitude. (The very range of *film noir* plots and character types identified by Durgnat and others is offered as evidence to support this position.) A Western can be tragic or comic, it can affirm or critique societal values. But in noir, the moral/philosophical range is limited to cynicism or fatalism, irony or despair. Despite the importance of this issue, it is not germane to the subject of this essay. Therefore, for the sake of convenience, *film noir* will be referred to as a genre in this essay.

5 The femme fatale of ancient myth was not necessarily in control of her seductive

and destructive power; but the femme fatale of *film noir* most definitely is. Place's term, 'spider woman', with its connotation of deliberate predation, is then perhaps more apt. See J. Place, 'Women in *Film Noir*', in E. A. Kaplan (ed.), *Women in* Film Noir, London: British Film Institute, 1980, pp. 35–68. The terms will be used interchangeably in this essay.

6 For a full discussion of noir style, see J. A. Place and L. S. Petersen, 'Some Visual Motifs of *Film Noir*', in B. Nichols (ed.), *Movies and Methods* Vol. I, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1976, pp. 325–38; also, P. Schrader, 'Notes on Film Noir', in B. K. Grant (ed.), *Film Genre Reader*, Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1986, pp. 169–82. Other useful studies of *film noir* include J. Tuska, *Dark Cinema: American Film Noir in Cultural Perspective*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984; J. P. Telotte, *Voices in the Dark: the Narrative Patterns of* Film Noir, Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1989; F. Hirsch, *The Dark Side of the Screen:* Film Noir, New York: Da Capo Press, 1981; as well as the aforementioned *Women in* Film Noir.

7 Original titles of Hong Kong films, including transliterations and translations, can be found at http://filmcritics.org.hk, the website of the Hong Kong Film Critics Society. The local critics were generally dismissive of this film. However, the Hong Kong Arts Centre included it in its screening series on the theme of sexual obsession presented in the autumn of 1998.

8 For example, lightning flashes cast a spectral glow on Siu-Yan's face, and on several occasions she appears so suddenly in the frame as to suggest supernatural powers of locomotion.

9 While the film is clearly a work of fiction, its background is not. There was a bloody war amongst the triads just prior to the handover of Macao to the PRC. (The film uses shots of actual newspaper photographs showing the carnage in its opening montage sequence.) Moreover, one of the problems in bringing this situation under control was the extent of police corruption, which the governor alluded to when using the phrase *ping tsei pu fen* which refers to the difficulty in telling cops and gangsters apart. V. Chang, 'Pre-handover Question Mark', *Free China Review*, September 1999, pp. 35–41. As a corrupt cop, Sam may not seem to fit the description of the 'ordinary man' at the centre of noir's trap narrative. But Sam is not a triad mole in the police force, as in *Infernal Affairs*. Rather, he makes no secret of his triad affiliation; and the other triads, such as Uncle Fat, come and go at will in the police headquarters. In other words, Sam's corruption is presented as commonplace, taken for granted; in this context then, Sam is indeed 'ordinary'.

10 *Sleepless Town* was produced by the Japanese companies Kadokawa Shoten and Ace Pictures. Nevertheless, the Hong Kong film establishment considered the film a Hong Kong production as indicated by the fact that it received the prize for Best Cinematography and Best Art Direction at the 18th Hong Kong Film Awards.

11 This brief synopsis does not begin to accurately describe the plot of *Sleepless Town*. There are numerous other characters, complex sets of relationships, and many secrets. Characters change sides more than once, although each spends most of his or her time, as the saying goes, playing both sides against the middle.

12 It is an interesting coincidence that Yinyin, too, almost drowns; but in the end is saved, not killed, by water.

13 Although this is a deviation between *film noir* and Noir East, there is one important American film that adheres to the Asian rather than the American pattern: *Chinatown*. The seeming femme fatale, Evelyn Mulwray, turns out to be a victim. Jake Gittes, the protagonist, believed the clues pointed to her guilt, but learns at the end he had misread them. It was her father, Noah Cross, whose very name connotes his archetypal/patriarchal status, who was the monster. But even

here there is a variation on the pattern that marks this work as American: in *Chinatown*, the monstrous father consumes his daughters; in the films of the Noir East, he destroys his sons.

14 Compare this situation to that of *Leave her to Heaven*, where Ellen's obsession to possess those she 'loved' began with her father. It is Richard's resemblance to her father that first attracts her attention to him on the train, a train taking her to New Mexico to scatter her father's ashes. Ruth later suggests that Ellen's possessiveness led to their father's death. In other words, a classic American femme fatale has the ability to overpower and destroy The Father; but Asian femmes fatale are always subordinate to the patriarch.

15 Hirsch, *The Dark Side of the Screen*, p. 20.

16 See, for example, S. Teo, 'The Squint-eyed Gaze', *The China Factor in Hong Kong Cinema*, Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1990, pp. 86–94.

17 There is an anachronism here. *Sleepless Town* is set in the year of its production, 1998. This could be deduced from such temporal markers as clothing, cars, and other items of *mise-en-scène*. But more to the point, an element of the plot turns on the fact that Valentine's Day falls the day before Lunar New Year eve. Such an event would not occur often, given the irregularities of the lunar calendar, but it did so happen in 1998. This being so, Xiao-lian and Fu-chun, are obviously too young to actually be 'war orphans' kids'.

18 Yuan invokes Liu Bei pejoratively, but it should be remembered that he is a positive character in the novel.

19 S. Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation', *Framework* 26, 1989, p. 70.

20 The Mysterious Orient, with all its negative connotations, has been used in *film noir* since its inception. It will be remembered that the Maltese Falcon, that symbol of untrammelled greed for which the various characters lie, steal, double-cross, betray and kill, originated in Asia Minor; and when the statuette arrives in San Francisco, it has come by ship from Hong Kong.

21 Kabukicho is the name of the district in which Tokyo's Chinatown is located.

10 Scenes of 'in-action' and noir characteristics in the films of Johnnie To (Kei-Fung)

1 This essay was conceived in response to the Conference call on 'Hong Kong/Hollywood at the Borders', and written in March 2004. Films that the director made after this date are not considered.

2 During World War II, French audiences were denied access to American films, so that when *Citizen Kane* was finally seen (and proclaimed a masterpiece) it looked strikingly different from other films, but in seeing so many films from a six- or seven-year period all at once, French critics noticed the new tendency. The key text is Raymond Borde and Étienne Chaumeton, *Panorama du Film Noir Américain*, Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1955.

3 See, for example, Todd Erickson, 'Movement becomes Genre', in Alain Silver and James Ursini (eds), *Film Noir Reader*, New York: Limelight Editions, 1996, pp. 307–30, and, Alain Silver, 'Son of *Noir*: Neo-*Film Noir* and the Neo-B Picture', *DGA Magazine* 17.3, June–July 1992, reprinted in *Film Noir Reader*, pp. 331–38.

4 In, 'Johnnie To's *PTU*: Blind Loyalty of a Night Voyager', interviewed by Thomas Shin, Hong Kong; in Thomas Shin (ed.), *Panorama 2002–2003*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong Arts Development Council, 2003, p. 82.

5 In an interview with Li Cheuk-To and Bono Lee, 'Beyond *Running Out of Time* and *The Mission*: Johnnie To Ponders One Hundred Years of Film' (the name of his new film company), where they asked To: 'Does the optimistic ending [of *The Mission*] fit in with your own mentality, or is there some kind of allegory about your feelings for the industry?' He stated:

> I've said that in 1999, my movies would not be tragic, and that's why I wouldn't go down the road of massive body counts in the end. Personally, I wanted a kind of breakthrough. Why do I need to have endings where everybody dies? I didn't want the kind of ending in *The Longest Nite* or *Expect the Unexpected*. The film industry is in such a downturn, I needed a sense of renewed hope. I myself needed it. Don't you think the audience needed it too?
>
> (*Hong Kong Panorama 1999–2000*, Hong Kong: Leisure and Cultural Services Dept./The 24th Hong Kong International Film Festival, 2000, p. 49)

6 In, 'Too Many Ways to be a Filmmaker: Interview with Johnnie To', Athena Tsui and Cochran Fong (eds), *Hong Kong Panorama 98–99*, Hong Kong: Provisional Urban Council of Hong Kong, 1999, p. 64.

7 Ibid.

8 From my own recollections – I was also on the panel – and from Winnifred Louis' report, posted on *Chinese Cinema Digest* 92, 6 August 1999. *Chinese Cinema Digest* is an e-newsletter, circulated to subscribers periodically.

9 From my report, posted on *Chinese Cinema Digest* 104 (14 August 1999). Based on a much more recent (uncredited) interview with To, David Bordwell states that '*The Longest Nite*, signed by Patrick Yau, [was] taken over by To after the first few days of shooting' and that the same thing happened with *Expect the Unexpected*, in the first serious essay written in English outside Hong Kong devoted to the director, 'The Films of Johnnie To: Louder Than Words', *Artforum*, May 2003, pp. 156–7.

10 See, '*A Hero Never Dies*: the End of Destiny', in *Hong Kong Panorama 98–99*, p. 79. Bryan Chang uses the same term, 'The Dark Trilogy', in his article in the same catalogue entitled, 'The Man Pushes on: the Burden of Pain and Mistakes in Johnnie To's Cinema', p. 75. *The Longest Nite* was completed in 1997, but not released until 1 January 1998. It ran for 23 days and grossed over HK$9.5m. *Expect the Unexpected* was released in May 1998 and grossed HK$5.4m, whereas *A Hero Never Dies* performed slightly better in September/October with HK$6.8m. But the combined grosses of these three films only barely topped that of the visually dark but thematically optimistic *Lifeline*, which was released on 3 January 1997 and made HK$20,757,187 as the 6th highest grossing Hong Kong film of the year. Johnnie To made his box-office comeback, of course, with the entertainment values of *Running out of Time* (and star power of Andy Lau), which grossed over HK$14.6m in September/October 1999. These figures are taken from the 'Hong Kong Filmography 1990–99', in *Hong Kong Panorama 1999–2000*, pp. 108–36.

11 The film affects me more powerfully, because the only truly negative experience I ever had in my experiences of travelling to Hong Kong was at the end of my first trip to Macao, where I was stuck, late at night, at the ferry terminal, and whereupon, on eventually getting back to Hong Kong Island I became lost, looking for my night bus.

12 In the interview with Li Cheuk-To and Bono Lee, op. cit., p. 48. To continued on Kurosawa, that, 'He could capture that just by having his protagonists stand in a scene – such energy just by being still. Without Kurosawa's films, I wouldn't be able to make *The Mission*'.

13 I first encountered this term when Bordwell compared contemporary Hong Kong and Hollywood cinemas in a Keynote Address presentation at the 2nd Hong Kong Baptist University International Conference on Chinese Cinema (20 April 2000), where he championed the overall determination to maintain continuity in Hong Kong action scenes (showing Ching Siu-Tung's *Chinese Ghost Story*, 1987) over the highly fragmented, less coherent Hollywood model (e.g. Michael Bay's *Armageddon*, 1998). He elaborated on 'Intensified Continuity: Visual Style in Contemporary American Film', *Film Quarterly* 55.3, Spring 2002, pp. 16–28.

14 Bordwell, 'The Films of Johnnie To', p. 156.

15 APPENDIX

Description of a sequence from: *THE MISSION* (Hong Kong), 1999
produced and directed by Johnnie To, for Milky Way Image (HK) Ltd.
Cinematography: Cheng Siu-keung
Editing: Andy Chan
Music: Chung Chi-wing
Sound: Martin Chappell
Art Director: Jerome Fung
With: Anthony Wong as Curtis, Francis Ng as Roy, Jackie Lui as Shin, Roy Cheung as Mic, Lam Suet as James, and, (Joe) Ko Hung as 'Boss Lung'

The action in the sequence takes place in the Tsuen Wan Plaza, northwest of Kowloon, in the New Territories.

The sequence begins at 40:52 and lasts 68 seconds. Shot #1 opens on a interior view of a restaurant, very brightly-lit with colored neon (or fluorescent) lights in the ceiling, as well as regular lighting. Two waiters, dressed in white and black are clearing up dishes at the left-of-frame, suggesting that the working day has ended. We hear the sounds of dishes and a noisy appliance (which is revealed later to be a vacuum cleaner). Five guys, wearing dark suits, are seated at two tables, either side of wooden doors in the background of the long shot. They rise as the grey-haired Boss Lung enters the restaurant through one of the two doors. The two men on the left, James and Roy, walk to the right of frame as the camera pans right, and music begins. A third man, Mic, joins the line behind Roy, and the other two, Curtis and Shin, fall in line behind the Boss. They pass another set of doors in the background wall, and in the midground we spot the gaudily dressed cleaner, working between tables. The line goes past a counter on the right as there is a straight cut on matching movement/ 41:03; 11 seconds have passed. Shot #2 is a Medium Shot of an escalator going down from the top left to the bottom right of frame. We notice the very shiny metal base of the next floor escalator at the top of screen-right. James is on the right, the boss in the center and Curtis on the left. The camera cranes down right with them, and there is a slight pan right as Shin enters the frame-left. We notice Roy walk into the frame from off-right. He has already gotten off the escalator, and, as the camera continues to pan right (it is no longer moving down), we also see Mic moving left and Shin turning the corner, sharply towards the left, his back to the camera, as he disembarks the escalator. The shot has a very blue cast, and we see highly reflective glass panels in the background. As the boss follows his bodyguards, the camera pans left. Cut on movement/41:11; 8 more seconds have elapsed. Shot #3 is a slightly low angle, Medium Close-Up of Roy looking off frame-left. The foreground is dark; Mic is directly behind Roy and we see three other heads as these men walk at the camera. The texture of the light blue/green background is soft, and as the camera tracks back with the characters' movement, the low angle becomes more pronounced, and the background lights turn off. Roy walks straight at the camera, darkening the frame, while Mic passes directly behind him. James is behind on the left, and he follows, brushing past the camera, out-of-focus, while Curtis, wearing sunglasses, is on the extreme left, and Shin is in the center. They are all wearing open-necked shirts, in various shades of blue. (Where is the boss?) They all exit the frame at the right edge and we begin to notice the low, shiny ceiling and the floor of the mall which is empty except for the lone figure of a dark-suited man in the deep left background, walking to the right as the camera (which had stopped earlier) tilts-down slightly and tracks (or, strictly speaking, 'dollies') in the reverse direction, into the frame towards him past a railing on the right, as he disappears behind a thick, circular column, on which is marked 'directory'. Cut on matching movement/41:21; 10 seconds later. Shot #4, an extreme-long shot, initially contains

a slight low angle, and clearly reveals the space to be that of a shopping mall, with columns to left and right, a large red box in the center, and a tall red and yellow banner draped on a column to its right and a low ceiling of a walkway across the frame. There is an open space in the background with a bank of two escalators right of center and numerous lights. The camera tracks-in as more lights are extinguished and as the camera passes into the open space, towards a water fountain, two more floor levels and escalators are revealed as well as a circular, possibly domed roof. The group of men can be glimpsed moving downwards on the third escalator from the bottom, and from this we can surmise that the restaurant was on the top floor. We can't see anyone else, and we can hear the sound of water and the continuing, electronic (escalator or 'elevator'?) music. Cut/41:28; after a 7-second shot. Shot #5 is a very high angle view of fountains, possibly a closer view of the same scene. When the camera tilts to a circular stage and the red box, we understand that we are on the right-hand side of the previous view. We notice the mechanical sound of escalators, and, as the camera continues to tilt up, we can spot the figure of a man in a white uniform shirt beginning to ride an up-escalator (from the ground floor) in the background of the ground floor. Cut/41:39; following a further 11 seconds. Shot #6 is a low angle Medium Close-Up on Curtis in the foreground, with Shin behind him on the right. We can see the red and yellow banner on a column in center-frame between them as more lights go out in the background. There is a slight pan left while the camera 'travels' with the men, as it is mounted on the escalator that they ride. Cut through about 30 degrees/41:42, 3 seconds later. Shot #7, is another low angle, Medium Close-Up, with the camera set up on the left side of the same escalator and we see four of the men. Roy, as always is in the front. He stares off-right, while Mic, behind him, looks up, James, who is next in line looks up and left, while Curtis is seen also looking up. (We might wonder, again, where the boss is hiding?) The camera again travels down the escalator, and, yet again, lights go out. Cut through over 100 degrees/41:44, only two seconds later. Shot #8 The camera is positioned behind the down escalator, looking across the mall in Long Shot, past the red box at the bottom right of frame at 3 banks of up-escalators, decorated with inverted orange triangles, panning and tracking right, possibly zooming-in to get closer to the middle escalator, with the man-in-white, apparently a security guard, beginning his ascent from the mall's second level. There is a slight tilt-up as, in the foreground (slightly out-of-focus), Roy and Mic slash across the frame from top right to bottom left on the second level down escalator, followed by James and Boss Lung (he's back!). Cut closer/41:51; after 9 seconds. Shot #9 is a Medium Long Shot of the 'security guard' which tilts-up slightly with his movement. Reverse-angle Cut (through 180 degrees)/41:55; after 4 seconds. Shot #10 is a Medium Shot of James at the bottom right of the frame, Boss Lung in the center. They are continuing their ride down to the right and a slight right pan accompanies this movement. Curtis enters the frame from the top left, and as Shin enters there is another reverse-angle Cut/41:57; only 2 seconds later. Shot #11 is a Medium Shot, framing only the head and shoulders of the 'security guard' at the bottom of the frame. The camera tracks right and tilts-up slightly, and as he draws a gun with his right arm beginning to aim at the camera, and as a percussive, rhythmic element is added to the music, there is a Cut on this movement, through 90 degrees/41:59; another 2 seconds later. Shot #12 is a Medium Close-Up, frontal view of the men, with Curtis dominating the foreground, as he draws his gun with his right arm across the frame from right to left, utilizing the full width of the cinemascope frame. Cut on this movement, and that of Curtis pushing his left arm downwards/42:00; less than a second later to [a Close-Up of Curtis's hand on Boss Lung's head as it is pushed down towards the left, with flash-panning down and left].

16 I did not think it necessary to define the American *Film Noir* in this essay, but, I can recommend *Film Noir Reader*, edited by Alain Silver and James Ursini, New York, Limelight Editions, 1996, as a place to begin for the reader unfamiliar with the tendency, especially, the translation of the seminal 'Towards a Definition of Film Noir', by Raymond Borde and Étienne Chaumeton (1955), pp. 17–26, and Paul Shrader's 'Notes on *Film Noir*' (1972), pp. 53–64.

11 Hong Kong goes international: the case of Golden Harvest

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12 Distant screens: film festivals and the global projection of Hong Kong cinema

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13 Competing regions: the chromatics of the urban fix

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14 Jackie Chan, tourism, and the performing agency

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